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Can detracking Raise Minority and
English Language Learners Standardized Test Scores?

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Abstract

To see if detracking can raise minority and English language learners’ standardized test scores, this case study surveyed teachers at a suburban high school to see how they perceived a recent detracking of their school. Student standardized test scores, from both the English-Language Arts STAR test and the English-Language Arts CAHSEE, were used to verify the teacher survey answers. Standardized test scores for all of the students in the school did rise after the detracking of the school, with the Hispanic-Latino population having the largest increase in proficiency and rates. English language learners’ scores were not found to be consistent from year to year but did have significant growth the year directly after detracking. Teacher surveys did not match with the standardized testing results, with at least half of the teachers stating that detracking only helped English language learners. In conclusion, this case study showed detracking to be beneficial in helping most students raise their standardized test scores.
Chapter 1

Study Introduction

Introduction

Public schools have the responsibility to teach all students living in the United States regardless of any special needs. For decades educators have theorized ways to meet all of the needs of diverse students and have tried different strategies to help students achieve their best academically. One idea, tracking, has been used to group students according to ability level. Tracking is used to place students in homogenous ability classes so teachers are able to focus on teaching one ability level and better tailor their instruction to meet the needs of their students. The decision on how to place students in a specific class is supposed to be unbiased and based on academic performance in previous classes and standardized tests. By tracking students into certain level classes, achievement scores of all students are supposed to increase because they are getting the targeted instruction they need.

Over the last thirty years, educational researchers, such as Hallinan (1994) have studied tracked classrooms and discovered tracking has not achieved the goal of increasing all students’ achievement. In fact, there are huge disparities found in achievement between higher ability tracked and lower ability tracked classrooms. Many theorists believe schools must be detracked, with students of different abilities being placed together in the same classroom. By placing heterogeneous students together in the same classroom, students are supposed to help each other achieve at higher levels and teachers are encouraged to provide targeted instruction on an individual basis. Whether detracked classes help students achieve more academically than tracked classes has not been thoroughly studied but detracked classes do allow all students access to the same quality education.
With the passage of the “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” education has not been focused on helping all students achieve but on how well they can demonstrate what they know and understand on standardized tests (United States Public Law 107-110, 2002). If students are unable to perform proficiently on such tests and make significant achievement gains each year, a school can face serious sanctions and consequences from federal and state governments. Not only must a school reach minimum achievement growth every year, but each subgroup of students (ex: special education, minority, English learners) must also make specific gains (California Department of Education, 2011).

In many states the student population is only becoming more and more diverse. For example, in California, the Hispanic student population is growing while the number of White and African American students is declining (Education Data Partnership, 2011). California also has a significant number of Asian students but their numbers are holding steady at 8% of the student population (Education Data Partnership, 2011). Of the 6.1 million students enrolled in California public schools, 24% of California public school students are classified as English Language Learners and spoke a language other than English at home. (California Department of Education, 2010). With such a diverse group of students, California educators need to figure out how to best educate all students and decide if tracking or detracking would best work to meet their students’ needs.

To avoid negative consequences that are required to come with low standardized test scores, schools need to focus on meeting the needs of all students, especially in the growing subgroups. In California, many schools are focusing on their English learners and minority students to ensure they hit their target standardized test achievement growth. If they do not make their goals, a school can still face sanctions, even if the whole school’s score increases. School
administrators have to determine, on a site to site basis, whether tracking would best help the needs of their unique students or if detracking provides more benefits.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to look at how tracking (placing students in homogenous academic ability leveled classes) and detracking (placing heterogeneous academic ability level students in the same classes) influenced standardized test results. Many schools in California struggle with their changing demographics and how to help increase the achievement of minorities and English language learners. This study focused on the standardized test scores of those two groups and see if detracking increased these two group’s achievement scores.

Many studies conducted on this topic have been generalized, looking at a whole school’s achievement results, rather than specific subgroups. This study focused on whether minority students and English learners benefit from detracking but also show if the achievement gap shrunk once the school detracked. To fully understand the school’s dynamic situation, a teacher survey was also used to see how teachers’ perceived detracking and its influence on standardized test scores and the school’s culture.

**Definitions and Abbreviations**

In education many different terms used to describe specific groups of students and standardized tests. California has several acronyms for groups of students. English language learners are students who speak a different language other than English at home and are often referred to as ELLs (California Department of Education, 2006). For the purpose of this study, minorities are defined as a group of individuals who are part of society but have characteristics, such as ethnicity, that often cause them to be treated differently (Merriam-Webster dictionary, definition 3).
Several different standardized tests were used to measure student achievement during this study. They are the California Standardized Test and Reporting (STAR) and California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The STAR test is used to see “how well students and schools are performing” and students are assessed in “math, reading, writing, science, and history” (California Department of Education, 2011). The CAHSEE is used to ensure students who earn a California diploma are at grade level in English and Mathematics. In order to graduate, students must receiving passing scores on both the English and Mathematics portions of the test (California Department of Education, 2011). Both the STAR and CAHSEE are required by the state, are administered in the tenth grade, and are used to determine if a school made its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and rate its achievement on the Academic Progress Index (API) (California Department of Education, 2011).

Research Questions

This study focused on the topic of detracking and its effects on achievement on standardized tests for minorities and ELLs. In order to fully examine this topic, the following research questions will be used to guide the study and ensure all variables are looked at:

1. Can detracking a school raise achievement scores on standardized tests for the whole student population?
2. Can detracking raise achievement scores on standardized tests for minority students?
3. Can detracking raise achievement scores on standardized tests for ELLs?
4. How do teachers perceive detracking and its effects on the school’s standardized test scores and culture?

The rest of this paper will review previous research on tracking, explain the methods for collecting data used, show the data results, and conclude with an analysis of this study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Faced with growing gaps in achievement between students, school administrators have to find a way to address the potential inequalities of education. For example, in California the API for white students was 810, while it was 650 for African Americans, 688 for Hispanic-Latino students, and 640 for ELLs (California Department of Education, Analysis, Measurement, and Accountability Division, 2011). This shows at least a 120 point difference among white students and their minority counterparts. Some researchers have blamed this problem on tracking and believe detracking is the answer. In this literature review I look at the possible benefits and consequences for a school using tracking, and take a closer look at how tracking specifically affects minority students and English language learners (ELLs). Lastly, I will review the effects of detracking on schools.

Benefits of Tracking Students

In education, tracking describes the placing of students in classes or groups based on their prior academic achievement or ability. The rationale behind using tracking in schools is so teachers are able to provide targeted instruction to a specific ability group of students and help students reach their full potential. (Hallinan, 1994). Researchers, such as Hallinan (1994), believe tracking would be beneficial if it were implemented correctly. To be done correctly, students need to be placed in correct level classes by an objective system without any input from parents or teachers. This is difficult as poor scheduling, parental input, and subjective teacher opinions are often included in the suggestions for student placement. Hallinan (1994) also argues creating “flexible tracking” may be a viable option because it allows for students that make
significant growth to move up to the next level, while students that are unable to keep up on their track may move down a level. If the tracked classes were completely homogenous, free from outside pressures, and flexible to meet students, these types of classes could benefit all levels of students.

In the article, “Can Tracking Improve Learning? Evidence from Kenya,” authors Duflo, Dupas, and Kremer (2009) also suggest tracking students based on ability can work in the right situation and if done correctly. Duflo, Dupas, and Kremer looked at tracked and non-tracked students in western Kenyan schools for two years. These schools were given money from International Child Support Africa to hire an extra first grade teacher to lower class sizes. As a result of the grant, many first grade classes were cut from an average of 84 students to 46 students. Students, experienced teachers, and beginning teachers were then randomly placed in tracked and non-tracked schools.

At the beginning of the study, Kenyan students were given standardized math and language tests to assess their current level of achievement. Tracked students were then placed in the correct ability classes, while non-tracked students were placed into classes based on their grade level. A year after being placed in their classes, students were given the achievement test a second time to see how much they learned throughout the year.

The test results showed both low tracked and high tracked student achievement scores rose (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer, 2009). When compared to similar students at non-tracked schools, students at the tracked schools scored higher on the achievement tests (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer, 2009). Duflo, Dupas, and Kremer (2009) explained there were several reasons tracking worked for these students. The authors argued large class sizes in the previous school system gave teachers a large range of student abilities to teach. By using tracking and allowing smaller
classes, teachers were able tailor their instruction to the ability group they were assigned (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer, 2009). Second, there was a positive correlation to classrooms taught by tenured teachers, many of whom were assigned to tracked classrooms (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer, 2009). The authors attribute some of the achievement in tracked classrooms to the assigned tenured teachers but ultimately believe tracking itself had a great impact on achievement.

The study in Kenya does show tracking can work if the students are tracked appropriately, effective teachers are assigned to tracked classes, and tracking is combined with smaller class sizes. However, the study in Kenya did not address how tracking affected different types of students. The study was also focused in a developing country, where education was not as prevalent as in the United States. The students who were part of the study were attending school voluntarily and one could assume, highly motivated to be successful. This is a different system than used in the United States, where schooling is compulsory. Thus, while this study shows tracking can be beneficial for some schools but does not all of the issues faced in Californian schools.

**Consequences of Tracking Students**

Several researchers, such as Rubin (2006) and Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, and LePore (1995), agree parts of tracking sound beneficial for teachers and students, but tracking does not often achieve its purpose. Studies have consistently shown tracking is detrimental for many students and can “play a crucial role in the creation of inequalities within our society” (Rubin, 2006, p. 5). Research only proves this point further with more minority students and low-income students filling up the lower level classes (Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, & LePore, 1995). Having low income and minority students placed in the lower level classes segregates these students and does not allow for the full social integration of students into the school culture.
Students are often aware of being a “top” or “bottom” student, which in turn influences their motivation in school (Weinstein, 1996).

When students are tracked into lower level and higher level classes, the achievement gap between the two groups also grows. Given time, the gap only grows larger and larger (Gamoran et al., 1995). Most researchers believe this gap is directly related to newer teachers primarily assigned to lower level classes and more tenured, experienced teachers assigned to higher level classes. Others believe it has to do directly with the type of instruction used in each of the classes (Rubin, 2006).

To find out exactly why students in lower tracks achieve less in the classroom, researchers Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, and LePore (1995) conducted a two year study of twenty-five secondary schools located in seven communities in the American Midwest. Only homogenous, tracked classes were included in the study. Gamoran et al. (1995) observed each participating classroom four times and focused on documenting how much time was spent on specific activities and on the types of questions teachers asked students. Students took achievement tests, tailored to what they actually learned in their classes, and filled out questionnaires in the fall and the spring.

After compiling all of the background information (ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability level, class enrollment, student participation, pretest and posttest scores) and categorizing all of the observation data (off task students, class discussions, uptake questions, and authentic questioning) the data validated most previous studies. Minority students and low socioeconomic students were overrepresented in the lower level classes and students in higher level classes demonstrated greater growth in achievement than students in lower level classes.
However, when observed there was little disparity in instruction within the three different levels of classes. All of the observed classes used some type of discussion, authentic questioning and uptake questions. Despite these three techniques being thought of as quality teaching techniques, more discussion or authentic questioning did not always lead to higher achievement. Honors student achievement scores were positively correlated with the use of discussion and authentic questioning in the class, while use of discussion and authentic questions were negatively correlated with achievement scores in remedial classes. As for being off task, honor students were not affected by the amount of off task behaviors, while regular and remedial students’ achievement went down when off task behaviors were evident in the classroom. Honors students were also more likely to complete their work, with regular level students second most likely, and remedial students being the least likely to complete work.

Gamoran et al. (1995) were surprised by some of their findings which led them to reassess their data. They found that while authentic questioning and discussion were happening in all three classes, only the honors classes were truly focused on the literature. In the regular and remedial classes it was found teachers would ask authentic questions about topics such as testing but were not observed asking as many literature based questions. The authors believe the topic of the question led to higher achievement by the honors students and less achievement of the regular and remedial students. As for the off task behaviors not affecting the honors students, the authors argued motivated students would be able to finish a task and be off task without disrupting their peers or losing any of their information. However, if a regular or remedial student started exhibiting off task behaviors, they would be less likely to go back and finish what they started.
The Gamoran et al. (1995) study explained some of the reasons we see lower achievement for lower tracked students, but they were not able to exactly pinpoint what could be done to help lower ability students be successful. Not much information was included about minority students or low socioeconomic students and how their experiences may be playing a part in their achievement scores. It also clearly shows tracking is negative for lower tracked students and is causing the achievement gap to widen due to distractions and off-topic questioning.

This study showed lower ability classes were using off topic discussions and high level off topic questioning. It is possible a detracked school which used on-topic high level questioning and discussions in its mixed ability classes, lower level students could potentially learn how to appropriately answer such questions just by being exposed to such questions. Schools must give lower level students the ability to grow, rather than be stuck at a low level.

Effects of Tracking on Minority Students

Studies on tracking have consistently shown minority students make up a large percentage of lower ability tracked students. For example, in their two year study, Gamoran et al. (1995) found in one working-class urban area “that 52% of the students were Black or Hispanic, but the proportion of minority students was 26% in honors classes, 52% in regular classes, and 65% in remedial classes” (p. 700). If tracking was equitable, the class ethnic compositions should reflect the community the school is serving.

Minorities disproportionately at the lower level and lower ability classes traditionally score lower than their higher level peers on standardized tests. Many studies have shown that tracking leads to more academic growth by higher level classes and less academic growth by
lower classes (Rubin, 2006). The longer ability groups are separated, the wider the achievement gap grows and the more irreparable damage is done to lower academic level students.

Not only are minorities disproportionately placed in lower academic levels, but Kershaw (1992) also argues tracking into lower levels discourages upward mobility by minorities who want to improve their lives. Kershaw focuses on the African American student experience in her article but it could be applicable to any minority student who is tracked into a lower ability track. When students are tracked in elementary school, it is hard for them to move into higher level tracks later in their educational career and they often finish school at the lower levels. Not only can finishing school at a lower level close doors of higher education for these students, but it also negatively affects these students’ perceptions of what they can accomplish (Kershaw, 1992). These students are also more likely to take on the negative expectations of teachers and administrators which leads to a “deterioration of commitment, motivation, self-esteem, performance, and conduct” (Kershaw, 1992, p. 161).

Taking these negative effects into context, tracking minority students into lower levels of school can have a lifelong effect on a student’s motivation, self-esteem, and even affect their quality of life after school. Detracking may not be the only solution for minority students, but by giving all students access to college preparatory classes they can choose for themselves what path they would like to follow after finishing school.

According to Khmelkov and Hallinan (2009) schools are not only expected to teach academics, but also to help students learn socialization skills, develop character, and form student attitudes. In a diverse society, it is up to teachers and administrators to help students learn respect for each other and encourage positive social relations among all students. Khmelkov and
Hallinan (2009) explain the more students interact and have access to different students, the better they understand and have positive feelings towards each other.

One way to ensure students have access to students different than themselves is to place them in classes together and allow them to interact. If you track students, and your tracks are not ethnically or socio-economically balanced, you are not exposing your students to the diversity of the community (Khmelkov & Hallinan, 2009). Not only can tracking reinforce negative stereotypes students have about each other, but it also can create stereotypes if one racial or economic group is dominant within a track. Several studies have shown race relations are worse in schools using tracking than schools that do not track. One study reported that, “students in tracked classes reported more racist remarks and worse interracial relations at their school” (Khmelkov & Hallinan, 2009, p. 634).

While tracking has been shown to be negative on achievement tests for students tracked into the lower level classes, there are other consequences to tracking as well. Tracking into the lower levels can effectively close the door to higher education for certain students. Tracking can lower a student’s self-esteem, their motivation to do well, and encourage negative behaviors. Schools which use tracking should also be aware of the possibility of negative race relations among students if a track is predominantly one race or another. There should be extra care taken to make sure all students feel welcome at school and that each student is receiving a fair and appropriate education.

Effects of Tracking on English Learners

The United States Department of Education describes English language learners as “those who did not grow up in a primary English-speaking setting and lack the skills necessary to learn in an English-only environment” (LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009, p. 568). ELLs are the
largest growing subgroup in Californian schools with more than 40% of California students speaking another language at home and 32% of California’s students considered English language learners (California Department of Education, Analysis, Measurement, and Accountability Division, 2011).

In most states ELLs must demonstrate proficiency in English before they are redesignated as fluent in English proficiency (R-FEP) and placed into mainstream classes. Many schools in the United States are required to offer English Language Development (ELD) classes to specifically help ELLs become proficient in English. In California, students tracked into ELD classes cannot be moved into mainstream English classes until they have demonstrated enough proficiency on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) (California Department of Education, 2006). Unfortunately it has become very hard for students to exhibit enough knowledge of English to leave ELD programs by the time they reach high school, and therefore they have become tracked and segregated from the general school programs for extended periods of time. The longer these students are tracked into ELD classrooms, the longer they are kept out of mainstream academic classes and they continue to fall behind their English proficient peers.

Callahan (2005) shows that 68% of 7 through 12th grade ELLs in California taking the CELDT have taken the test more than seven times and have not been reclassified R-FEP and cannot join their peers in mainstream classes. Even when showing moderate knowledge of English and scoring in the mid-range on the CELDT, ELLs are often placed in classes with modified instruction and that are not as academically rigorous as mainstream classes. These classes could be considered the lower academic track of schools and have been found to have comparable achievement results as lower academic tracked classes. Tracking ELLs into
modified classrooms widens the achievement gap between them and their English proficient peers while preventing them from equal access to education.

LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones (2009) looked at upper elementary English learners and non-English learners and their perceptions of their classes, with ELLs being tracked into ELD classes and non-English learners into mainstream classes. The researchers believed ELLs would have a more negative perception of their classroom, thus affecting their academic achievement. Most ELLs, however, perceived their classes to be positive and supportive learning environments, but did recognize their classes as having lower levels of academic effectiveness than their mainstreamed peers (LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009). These results were contradictory to previous research done, so the authors speculated that perhaps ELLs “perceptions of their classroom environments are different in elementary, middle, and high schools, becoming more negative with time” (LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009, p. 575). If ELLs perceive their classrooms to be less academically challenging than their mainstream peers, they may become more disillusioned by being tracked into the lower level classes and this could potentially lead to their more negative perceptions later in their schooling. By detracking classes, schools could thwart the negative perceptions of ELLs and allow them access to equally academically challenging classes and potentially lessen the achievement gap.

To find out whether language acquisition or track placement predicts student achievement, Callahan (2005) conducted a study using data from a rural high school in Northern California. The school served mostly working class families, and 32% of the 2000 students enrolled were speaking a language other than English at home (Callahan, 2005). Only students designated as ELLs were used for the study since it was specifically looking at the achievement of ELLs. Callahan used grade point average (GPA), number of credits, and scores from the
California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) and SAT9 test to show a student’s academic achievement.

Learning English was important to the long-term success of the ELLs, but it was not the only determinant of an ELL’s academic achievement. In fact, the level of English proficiency was only significant in two of the academic measures, the SAT9 reading and CAHSEE language arts. When looking at GPA, more than one half of English language learners who were tracked into the lower level classes received As and Bs on their report cards (Callahan, 2005). Only a quarter of advanced English learners earned grades of As and Bs on their report cards. The author attributed this difference in GPA to higher expectations placed on students in more advanced classes. She explains students who were moved from lower level classes, where there were lower expectations, struggled once faced with the much higher expectations. Callahan (2005) believes that if these students were exposed to high expectations from the beginning they would not struggle so much later in their academic career.

The study found that less than 2% of ELLs took enough college preparatory classes to attend university (Callahan, 2005). This fact explicitly shows there are lower academic standards for ELLs than mainstream students who are mostly enrolled in college preparatory classes. By tracking ELLs into non-college preparatory classes, schools are also closing the door to higher education to ELLs. Despite the low numbers of students enrolled in more academically rigorous classes, Callahan (2005) found students with more academic knowledge, rather than language acquisition, had better grades, more credits, and higher scores on the SAT9 math test. Thus, she argues ELLs need to be placed in more academically rigorous courses which focus on academic language in order to help them achieve more academically and push them to be more
successful in school. By placing students in higher leveled tracks, and not just beginning ELD classes, students will also have more options open to them in the future.

Callahan (2005) exposes what many thought was true: ELLs need to have access to academic language and not just be taught English. The more academic language they are exposed to, the better prepared for higher level classes and the standardized achievement tests required by the federal and state governments. Detracking ELLs and allowing them access to higher level classes could not only possibly motivate them to learn English, but inspire them to continue onto higher education.

**Detracking**

Researchers such as Rubin (2006), Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, & LePore (1995) have proven tracking detrimental to students in the United States. Tracking has increased the achievement gap between high achieving and low achieving students, has segregated minority and low income students into the lower academic levels, has closed the doors of opportunity to those tracked into lower levels, increased racism at some schools, decreased self-esteem and motivation among lower tracked students, exposed students to inferior learning environments, and stalled the academic achievement of English learners who are trying to be successful in American schools. Some, like Rubin (2006), believe detracking would be a better approach to give all students an equal education.

Detracking is usually defined as “an attempt to group students heterogeneously as a means of ensuring that all students, regardless of their race or class background or academic ability, have access to high-quality curriculum, teachers, and material resources” (Rubin, 2006, p. 6). Parents of high achieving students, or those students who are least affected by tracking, often have negative feelings about detracking (Rubin, 2006). They believe their children’s
achievement would be hurt by students of lower ability and therefore like having tracked classes (Hanushek, Kain, Markman, & Rivkin, 2003).

To look for how peer ability affects student achievement, researchers Hanushek, Kain, Markham, & Rivkin (2003) looked at three successive classes of Texas public elementary school students as they went through school. The study used students who were entering third grade and only included mainstream Black, Hispanic, and White students, with ELLs, Asians, and special education students being dropped from the analysis. Researchers wanted to focus on how achievement was affected by ability and felt these “other” factors caused complications in the data analysis of achievement, race, and socio-economic status (Hanushek, Kain, Markham, & Rivkin, 2003).

Hanushek, Kain, Markham, & Rivkin (2003) found lower income students do not harm the achievement of their peers and categorical funds given to schools to specifically help low-income students might actually benefit the whole school. They found certain students have more influence on their peers than other students. For example, the top one-fourth achieving students are less affected by peer achievement than the bottom three-fourths. Little evidence showed changes in the diversity of students affecting the rate of academic growth. Thus, a diverse student body did not affect the academic growth of students as much as the ability level of the student body.

The Hanushek, Kain, Markman, & Rivkin (2003) study proves detracking can be beneficial to students and that diverse students do not negatively affect the student achievement of a school. Parents of high achieving students should not worry their student’s scores will go down since their achievement does not seem to be affected by a diverse student body. High
achieving students may even benefit from having low-income peers because there are often funds made available to schools serving low-income students.

In a study looking at different types of schools, their use of tracking, and achievement, Robert (2010) hypothesized that more selective schools would outperform public schools serving all students, and that ability tracked students would show higher academic achievement. After looking at schools from 23 different European countries, Robert (2010) concluded he was wrong about ability grouping. After looking at standardized test scores for reading, math, and science the achievement scores of students who were not tracked were higher than those tracked (Robert, 2010). He also found the larger proportion of certificated teachers teaching at a school, the higher student achievement. Lastly, the more selective the school, the better the achievement scores were at that school. While the author was correct in believing more selective schools would be more successful, he did explain selective schools have the ability to choose students and selectively admit only students who have the resources to get help if needed, rather than public schools which serve any student who enrolls.

While the Robert (2010) study does give some merit to selectively choosing students, it also shows detracking is beneficial when trying to increase student achievement and serving all students. Public schools in the United States do not have the ability to be selective, thus detracking may be one of the ways to increase achievement among students. The Robert (2010) study also shows certificated teachers led to higher achievement scores, therefore public schools should only hire qualified teachers who use effective instructional techniques to reach all students.

Examples of detracking success have been shown in the United States. In her article, Rubin (2006) uses a school in New York as a positive example of detracking. The school
instituted detracking and as a result had 71% of low-income students pass the New York Regent’s exam and the Regent’s diploma rate rose from 58% to 96% (Rubin, 2006, p. 7). She also maintains that giving students control over their own classes also increases their desire to succeed because they are invested in their choice. Detracking also gives more access to higher education to all students, rather than only the higher ability students, and could lead to a better educated American population (Rubin, 2006). While detracking seems to have some positive results, there still needs to be more research done to determine what effects detracking may have on minority students and ELLs and whether it can helping them achieve more academically. Chapter 3 will explain the methods used for collecting data to see if detracking can raise minority and English language learners standardized test scores in a Southern California high school.
Chapter 3

Research Methods

Introduction

After reviewing previous research, one may conclude that tracking is negative and detracking is a way to help all students gain access to quality education and raise standardized test scores. Studies, such as one conducted by Hanushek, Kain, Markman, & Rivkin (2003), looked at the negatives of tracking and acknowledge detracking as a possible solution to the problem. However, there is not much research to prove that detracking gives all students open access to classes or raises student achievement. Even less research has been done to see the effects of detracking on minorities and ELLs to see if their standardized test scores rose at detracked schools.

To address the lack of comparison of tracked and detracked schools, this case study surveyed teachers who worked at a school when it tracked, experienced the detracking process, and worked at the same school after classes were detracked. To confirm what was written on the surveys, standardized testing data was collected. This study focused on minority and ELL student standardized test scores to see if there was a significant change in detracked student scores. This study used data from a suburban high school in Southern California with a large minority population and a significant number of ELLs. To guide the study the following research questions were addressed:

1. Can detracking a school raise achievement scores on standardized tests for the whole student population?
2. Can detracking raise achievement scores on standardized tests for minority students?
3. Can detracking raise achievement scores on standardized tests for ELLs?
4. How do teachers perceive detracking and its effects on the school’s standardized test scores and culture?

This chapter will talk about the study’s design, the study participants, the setting for the research, the procedures used, and how the study’s data was analyzed.

Design

According to Mertler and Charles (2011), case study research is used when to give an “in-depth analysis of a single, restricted entity” and involves both qualitative and quantitative data to “develop a high detailed description and gain an understanding of an individual entity” (p. 273). This study looked at one specific school to see how the school changed when it began to detrack classes. Teachers who were present during the last year of tracking and the first year of detracking were surveyed to get their perspective of how well students achieved on standardized tests before and after detracking of the core academic classes.

To verify the qualitative data collected from the surveys, the English-Language Arts STAR and CAHSEE test scores were used for quantitative data. These two tests were used because they are used by the State of California when measuring a school’s achievement and calculating the AYP and API for a school. Since both tests are used in grading a school’s achievement at the federal and state government levels, they are appropriate in grading subgroups of student achievement.

Participants

I placed surveys in teachers’ mailboxes who were present at the tracked and detracked versions of the school, work in different content areas of the school, were in contact with tenth grade students during both of the years studied, and represent different levels of teaching experience. I also emailed the chosen teachers to explain the survey and asked that when
finished the survey to place it back in my box without their name so they could not be identified. The survey also stated that all answers submitted would be used for research purposes.

For quantitative data to confirm the survey answers, standardized testing data was collected for five consecutive years. All grades test scores were collected for all five years to give a broader picture of the school while it was in the process of detracking. Since tenth graders take both the English-Language Arts STAR test and the CAHSEE, they were the focus on data analysis. Two different sophomore classes were used, students enrolled in 10th grade English classes in the 2006-2007 school year and those enrolled in 10th grade English classes in the 2008-2009 school year. The 2006-2007 class was chosen because it was the last 10th grade cohort to have tracked classes. For the 2006-2007 class, students were able to choose between Transitional English 10, English 10, college preparatory English 10, and college preparatory Honors English 10. There were 741 students enrolled in 10th grade during the 2006-2007 school year. The ethnic make-up of the 2006-2007 10th grade sophomore class is demonstrated in the chart below (Figure 1). In regards to the school’s API scores, the only ethnic group that is numerically significant is Hispanic/Latinos. So for this study Hispanic/Latinos were the only ethnicity included in the “minority” category.
The 2008-2009 sophomore class was chosen because it was the first class considered detracked. All students were placed in college preparatory classes, many with the same titles as in 2006-2007 school year: Transitional English 10, English 10, and Honors 10. There were 742 10th grade sophomores enrolled in the 2008-2009 school year and the ethnic make-up of the class is shown the chart below (Figure 2). Again for the 2008-2009 school year, Hispanic/Latinos made up the only numerically significant group when looking at the school’s API so it was the only ethnic group used for the “minority” comparison.
All of the students in each respective class were included in my study. When referring to subgroups, such as Hispanic/Latino, White, or ELL, I am using the categories used by the state of California and collected from the students themselves. This information is publicly available on the California Department of Education state website.

**Setting**

The school chosen for this study was a suburban high school located in San Diego County. During the 2006-2007 school year there were 2903 total students enrolled (Educational Data Partnership, 2011). The general school ethnic breakdown for the 2006-2007 school year is shown in the chart below and is only slightly different than the ethnic make-up of the sophomore class (Figure 3). In 2006-2007, the average English class size was 24.8 students and 93% of all the teachers were fully credentialed in their subject area. (Educational Data Partnership, 2011).
During the 2008-2009 school year there were 2941 students enrolled at this high school (Education Data Partnership, 2011). The ethnic make-up for the 2008-2009 school year is shown in the chart below (Figure 4). The average class size for English in 2008-2009 was 23.9 students and 96% of teachers were fully credentialed in their subject area (Education Data Partnership, 2011). The majority of the teachers working at this high school are of white/Caucasian descent, but .8% of teachers are Filipino and 14.4% are Hispanic (Education Data Partnership, 2011).
When picking a school to study, I chose the school where I currently work. It recently detracked, has a large number of ELL students, and I was comfortable with the staff and felt they would be honest in the surveys. For a list of potential teachers to complete the survey, I looked at teachers who worked with tenth grade students during both the 2006-2007 and 2008-2009 school years. Then I asked all of the prospective teachers if they would participate in the study.

Teachers were asked to anonymously complete the survey (Appendix A) and place it in my box so there would be no way to identify who completed the survey. Teachers were asked to identify their department to ensure departments were equitably represented. If a department was not represented, an email to perspective teachers went out to ask for more participation. The questions asked were open ended and participants were asked to elaborate on their answers. The full survey can be seen in Appendix A, but a summary of the questions are:

1. What were the school’s standardized test scores (STAR/CAHSEE) like in the years prior to the detracking of students?
2. Do you believe detracking has helped your school raise all students’ standardized test scores? Please explain.
3. Do you believe detracking has helped raise minority students’ standardized test scores? Please explain.
4. Do you believe detracking has helped raise English Language Learners’ standardized test scores? Please explain.
5. Do you believe the school’s culture has changed since the detracking of the school? Why/why not?

The survey answers were then coded to establish the themes between what survey participants wrote in their responses. I reviewed the surveys and the coded material to make
connections from the answers to my research questions. Not only were similar answers reviewed, but I also looked at the “different” answers to see where they fit in the scheme of the school. Once the survey data was simplified, it was reviewed and used to make conclusions about the effects of detracking at the studied school.

Using the California Department of Education’s website, the school’s English-Language Arts STAR and CAHSEE test scores were downloaded for the years between 2006 and 2011. To make sense of all of the different scores I created graphs and charts that made it easy to compare the different school years’ results and show patterns among the different groups.

Analysis

The surveys were coded to make sense out of the different answers. The codes were then placed into graphs to give the data a visual representation. Then the data was analyzed and connections were made between the answers. Using the general themes, I was able to make conclusions about the effects of detracking on the standardized tests scores.

To verify what was found in the surveys, I created charts to compare the scores for the STAR & CAHSEE English-Language Arts scores from 2006 to 2011 for the school as a whole, for minority students, and ELLs. Using the school’s information about curriculum and staff changes I decided detracking the school did have an impact on the minority students’ standardized test scores.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 explained the methods used to collect the data comparing standardized test scores from one tracked school year and detracked school year at the same school. The focus was on minority and ELL students’ test scores to see if detracking specifically helped these students raise their achievement scores. Chapter 4 will share the results of the data collected and Chapter
5 will discuss how this data could be used to influence decisions made within a school in regards to detracking.
Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

The previous chapter explained the methods used for collecting data. This chapter will explain all of the data. First, it will look at the answers teachers, who taught between the years of 2006 and 2011, gave on the anonymous survey. The teacher answers were categorized to show whether teachers believed detracking at their school has helped raise standardized test scores and if they believed the school culture has changed for the better since detracking. This chapter will also examine standardized testing data for the years between 2007 and 2011. Both the STAR test scores and CAHSEE test scores are used to determine if student scores are improving.

Qualitative Data-Teacher Survey

Out of the 30 teachers asked to complete a survey, 14 surveys were completed and placed in my box. Three World Language, three English-Language Arts, two Science, three Visual and Performance Arts, one Social Studies, and two Math teachers completed the surveys. Out of the four Physical-Education teachers asked to complete the survey, no teacher completed the survey. They did not give any reasons for not participating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th># of Surveys Returned</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Language</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English-Language Arts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual &amp; Performing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For question one, “What were the school’s standardized test scores (STAR/CAHSEE) like in the years prior to the detracking of students?” (Appendix A), the majority of teachers answered that they did not know. Three answered test scores were “not great”, while others answered “up & down” and “about the same”. In explaining their answers, one teacher stated test scores have “improved since detracking” and that it is because “we’ve built more rigor into our average classroom.” (Survey 3, Appendix B) Another teacher explained he/she believed test scores are about the same because “lower performing students were at the same level.” (Survey 9, Appendix B) From a mathematics perspective, Survey 12 explained “the non-CP [college preparatory] class students fared worse. When they went to CP classes, support classes were added to assist those who needed it. Apparently, these supported students helped STAR & CAHSEE scores go up.” (Appendix B)
When asked “Do you believe detracking has helped your school raise all students’ standardized test scores?” (Appendix A), most teachers answered “no” but four answered “yes”. Several who answered “no” blame the misplacement of students and believe students are placed into higher level classes than what they are prepared for. All of the teachers who answered “yes” believed higher expectations of students are the primary reason why test scores went up after detracking. Two other teachers believed test scores have gone up but do not believe the school has been fully detracked. Teachers believed their classes are still tracked, so detracking cannot be attributed to higher test scores.
Answers to question three were similar to the answers for question two. Seven teachers do not believe detracking has helped minority students raise their standardized test scores, while four teachers believed detracking has helped raise standardized test scores. Those who answered “no” attributed remedial and support classes as the reason test scores went up, not the detracking of students. Those who answered “yes” believed standardized test scores went up because the expectations of students went up, leading to higher achievement by students. Two teachers commented that their classes are still tracked and another teacher chose to not respond to the question.
Question four, “Do you believe detracking has helped raise English language learners’ standardized test scores? Please explain.” had eight “yes” responses and three “no” responses (Appendix A). Teachers who responded “yes” to the question believe the support classes and higher expectations for English language learners because of detracking helped raise standardized test scores. Teachers who responded “no” commented that detracking should not be given credit for the higher test scores, but that there are other reasons for ELLs success. One teacher answered “if the student is motivated…yes! If not…no!” (Survey 2, Appendix B). Two teachers responded that if test scores had gone up it is not due to detracking because they believe their classes are still tracked.
When asked “Do you believe the school’s culture has changed since the detracking of the school? Why/why not?” the majority of teachers answered “no” with a few teachers answering “yes” and “not sure”. Teachers who answered “no” believe there is a larger divide between certain students (college bound vs. non-college bound) and there is a difference in culture between different graduating classes. Teachers who answered that detracking has changed the culture believe teachers are teaching differently, are more accepting, and that students are interacting with each other more. One teacher said the culture had changed “a little” while another answered the culture had changed “for the worse.” The teacher who believed the culture has changed “for the worse” believed some expectations have been made too high for students and those who fail college preparatory classes become disillusioned with school. One teacher believed the culture has both changed and not changed. This teacher believed ELLs feel more welcome in class but that students are not proud of their test scores and are not taking ownership of how they score on standardized tests.
Qualitative Data, School Staffing & Curriculum

Since detracking in 2008-2009, the high school hired twelve new teachers. Of the new teachers, there were six English-Language Arts, one Mathematics, one Physical Education, three Social Studies teachers, and one World Languages teachers were hired. As for administrative changes, all of the assistant principals were present during the years studied and when the detracking occurred. One assistant principal position was cut in the 2009-2010 school year. The current principal has been at the principal of the school since the 2005-2006 school year.

There were no new curriculum programs initiated at the school, other than making all classes college preparatory classes (detracking). No new textbooks were adopted and no new classes were created. There was an English Language Development (ELD) department created to better assist the ELLs during the 2009-2010 school year. The department consists of all teachers who teach transitional, English Language Development (ELD), and Spanish Language Development (Spanish for native Spanish speakers).
Quantitative Data, English-Language Arts STAR Proficiency Levels

Standardized testing data was collected through the California Department of Education’s website. The state of California requires all ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade students to take the English-Language Arts STAR tests. Scores are reported at the end of the school year, so the year displayed for the test results are for the school year ending in the reported year. When calculating a school’s performance, only proficient students are included in the data, so the percentage of proficient students is used in this section. Data about all grades taking the English-Language Arts STAR test are included in this data set to give a broader view of the school and the possible effects of detracking.

After detracking in the 2008-2009 year, the percentages of proficient students went up on the English-Language Arts STAR test for grades 9 through 11 (twelfth graders are not tested). The most significant gain in percent proficient was seen in the 11th grade students with a 14 percent increase in the number of 11th graders scoring proficient on the English-Language Arts STAR standardized test from between the 2007 results and 2011 results. Ninth graders saw an increase in students proficient in the English-Language Arts STAR after detracking occurred in the 2008-2009 school year, but then saw a drop in the 2011 proficiency rates. Tenth grade English-Language Arts student proficiency levels went up the first year of detracking, went down after a year of detracking and rose again in 2011. If you take out the Hispanic-Latino 10th grade population and only include 10th grade non-Hispanics, the percent of proficient students in 2007 goes up to 57% and percent of proficient students rises to 67% in 2011.
For the minority group at this high school, Hispanic-Latinos, English-Language Arts STAR proficiency rates for all grade levels went up after detracking in 2008-2009. Ninth grade Hispanic-Latino students had the highest percentage of proficient students in 2006-2007 and continued to have the highest proficiency rates in 2010-2011. Eleventh grade Hispanic-Latino students made the largest gain in proficiency with 22% more proficient students in 2010-2011 than in 2006-2007. Tenth grade Hispanic-Latino students saw a steady increase in the proficiency levels from the 2007 to the 2011 STAR tests but the proficiency rate did not reach that of the ninth or eleventh graders. By taking out ELLs (the lowest scoring subgroup within the Hispanic-Latinos) of both the proficiency rates were higher, with 43% scoring proficient in 2007 and 52% scoring proficient in 2011.
Figure 11, Percent of Proficient Hispanic-Latino Students on the English-Language Arts STAR Test, Grades 9-11

Source, California Department of Education, Standardized Testing and Reporting

For the ELLs, the proficiency levels on the English-Language Arts STAR test are much lower than the general school population and the Hispanic-Latino population. After detracking took place in 2008-2009, proficiency levels for all three grades shot up with 15% of 9th graders, 6% of 10th graders, 9% of 11th graders proficient on the English-Language Arts portion of the STAR. In 2010, 0% of the eleventh grade ELL students scored proficient on the English-Language Arts STAR test. While tracking in 2006-2007, the proficiency levels of the ninth grade students were at their highest level with 16% of ninth grade ELLs being proficient. Since detracking, proficiency levels for ninth grade ELLs were almost been cut in half, to 8% of ELLs being proficient in 2010-2011. Tenth grade ELL students also saw a decrease in proficiency levels after detracking, going from 4% in 2006-2007, to 3% in 2010-2011. Only 1% of eleventh grade ELLs were proficient in 2006-2007, that dropped to 0% proficient in 2007-2008, rose to their highest levels of proficiency (9%) in 2008-2009. Then again in 2009-2010, 0% of eleventh grade ELLs were proficient in the English-Language Arts STAR test. In 2010-2011 the
percentage of eleventh grade ELLs only went up to 1% for no gains overall in proficiency levels from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011.

In overall proficiency rates, there was a large achievement gap between the general school population and the English language learners. Ninth grade students English-Language Arts students had higher proficiency levels than the tenth and eleventh grade students in all three categories. Both the general population group and the Hispanic-Latino groups for all grade levels had an upwards curve in on their proficiency levels from 2006-2007 to 2009-2010. In 2010-2011 the proficiency levels did dip for some grade levels, but overall the general population and Hispanic-Latinos still had higher proficiency levels in 2010-2011 than the tracked groups in 2007-2008.
Figure 13, Percent of Proficient Students on the English-Language Arts STAR Test, Grades 9-11

Source, California Department of Education, Standardized Testing and Reporting

Quantitative Data, English-Language Arts CAHSEE

Tenth grade students are required to take the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). The CAHSEE has both an English-Language Arts component and a Mathematics component. In order to receive a high school diploma, students must pass both portions of the CAHSEE. Schools are judged by what percentage of tenth grade students pass each portion of the test. For the purpose of this study, only the percentages of passing students on the English-Language Arts portion were used so they could be directly compared to scores on the 10th grade English-Language Arts STAR proficiency rates.

While tracking, in 2007-2008, 84% of all the school’s tenth grade students passed the English-Language Arts portion of the CAHSEE exam. Seventy-one percent of the 10th grade Hispanic-Latino students and 40% of the 10th grade ELLs passed the English-Language Arts
portion of the CAHSEE. After detracking in 2008-2009, the general school population stayed at an 84% passing rate, while Hispanic-Latino students went up to 74% and ELLs went up to a 45% passing rate. Hispanic-Latino students made the largest gain in passing rates with 11% more students passing the CAHSEE in 2011 than in 2007. English language learners made large gains right after the detracking of classes, but then passing rates started sliding downwards in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.

![Figure 14, Percentage of 10th Grade Students Passing the English-Language Arts CAHSEE](image)

*Figure 14, Percentage of 10th Grade Students Passing the English-Language Arts California High School Exit Examination*

*Source: California Department of Education, California High School Exit Examination*

**Conclusion**

Teacher surveys showed many teachers did not know what test scores were like prior to the detracking of classes. Many teachers also stated they did not believe detracking helped raise standardized test scores of the general school population or minority students but that it has helped raise standardized test scores of ELLs. When asked about school culture, several teachers answered that they believe the culture has become more accepting of all students and that classes
have become more rigorous since detracking. Other teachers stated they did not believe the school culture has changed for the better and that there is a larger divide between the higher achieving students and lower achieving students.

Proficiency rates overall for the English-Language Arts STAR test also went up for the general school population and Hispanic-Latino students. English language learners’ scores went up the first year of detracking, but in all grades the ELLs scores have decreased since the first year of detracking. As for the CAHSEE, passing rates for Hispanic-Latino students went up after the detracking, while the levels for the general school population stayed stagnant. English language learners made gains the first year of detracking, but the passing rates went down after 2010.

Chapter 5 will discuss the connections between the teacher surveys and the standardized test scores and try to answer the research questions. It will also explain the significance of these findings on schools today and how they can influence administrators’ decisions on detracking.
Chapter 5

Conclusions & Recommendations

Introduction

Several studies, such as Kershaw (1992), declared tracking, the placement of homogenous academic ability level students into the same classroom, as a negative educational practice because lower academic ability classes were segregating low socio-economic and minority students from their peers and the achievement scores of such students were often a lot lower than their higher academic ability peers. The perception was that if schools detracked their classes, or placed heterogeneous academic ability students together in college preparatory classes, that the achievement gap created by tracking would either shrink or disappear altogether. This case study of one school looked at the following four questions to determine if detracking could help standardized test scores of students at a detracked school:

1. Can detracking a school raise achievement scores on standardized tests for the whole student population?
2. Can detracking raise achievement scores on standardized tests for minority students?
3. Can detracking raise achievement scores on standardized tests for ELLs?
4. How do teachers perceive detracking and its effects on the school’s standardized test scores and culture?

By surveying some of the school’s teachers and through the analysis of standardized testing data for five years, two tracked and three detracked, this case study determined that minority students’ standardized test scores rose significantly after detracking, all students’ standardized test scores rose a little after detracking, and ELLs showed some positive increases in standardized test scores right after detracking but their scores declined in recent years.
Conclusions

The teacher surveys were insightful in showing how the teaching staff viewed detracking. Most teachers could not recall what the standardized test scores were like prior to detracking and many did not believe the general school population or minority students were affected by detracking. Standardized test scores did not correlate with the teachers’ opinions and actually proved them wrong. For tenth grade students who took the English-Language Arts STAR test, not only did the all students’ scores go up, but Hispanic-Latino students’ scores went up significantly and were able to close some of the achievement gap.

The same could be said for the CAHSEE passing rate for all students and the minority group, Hispanic-Latinos. After detracking these groups’ passing rates on the CAHSEE went up. In 2007 there was a 14% difference in the passing rate of all students and Hispanic-Latino students. In 2011, the difference was decreased to 7% even though the general populations’ passing rate went up concurrently. This is a significant closure in the achievement gap between the general school population and the Hispanic-Latino students. This leads to the conclusion that detracking seems to have helped raise all students’ and minority students’ scores, but that the school’s faculty are unaware of the gains made by these two groups.

While detracking may account for many of the gains made on both the proficiency rates on the English-Language Arts STAR and passing rates on the English-Language Arts CAHSEE for all students and the minority students, it must also be noted there were several new teachers hired in the years after detracking. These teachers could be partially responsible for the higher test scores. Six of the new teachers worked in the English-Language Arts department, which means they could have directly influenced the students taking the 10th grade English-Language Arts CAHSEE test. However, to see if these teachers directly influenced the test scores, more
research into what classes these new teachers taught and which students they had would be necessary and not applicable to this study.

When asked about ELLs and if their standardized test scores were helped by detracking, over half of the staff members surveyed replied they believed detracking helped bring up ELLs scores. When looking at the data, ELLs test scores did go up on the English-Language Arts STAR once the initial detracking occurred by went down in the 2010 and 2011 school years. The English-Language Arts CAHSEE passing rates for ELLs are very similar to the proficiency rates on the English-Language Arts STAR. The passing rates increase in 2009 and then decline in 2010 and 2011. Thus both the English-Language Arts STAR proficiency rates and the English-Language Arts CAHSEE passing rates seem to prove the staff members’ perceptions wrong. It is possible teachers believe all students in the minority group, Hispanic-Latino, are ELLs and therefore are combining the groups.

Other than detracking, one possible reason for the decline in proficiency rates is that the new ELD department was created during the 2009-2010 school year, when test scores first went down. The ELD department was created to give targeted instruction to ELLs to help them become proficient in English. After the department was created, the number of ELLs tested went down from 466 students in 2009 to 315 students in 2011 (Department of California, Standardized Testing and Reporting, 2011). This could mean the department has been successful in helping ELLs learn English well enough to become redesignated as fluent in English proficiency (R-FEP). Thus, the higher level ELLs were possibly reclassified, thus their higher test scores were no longer included in the ELLs category. This does not fully account for the decline in standardized test scores, but it does give some perspective into the ELLs situation. Further
research into the number students who were declared R-FEP would be crucial to verify this conclusion.

When asked about school culture, many of the teachers stated they did not believe the school’s culture changed after detracking. However, several of the answers for questions two through four reflect something different. Six teachers stated they believed there were higher expectations for all students after the detracking of classes. A change in the school’s culture could have potentially help raise standardized test scores. Also, for the few teachers who did believe the school’s culture changed, they explained there seemed to be more interaction between the different racial groups on campus. One teacher even went as far to say detracking seemed to have made “…many of my native Spanish speakers feeling more in equal in being placed in college prep courses.” (Appendix B, Survey 6) These feelings of higher expectations and more interaction between the different groups of students may not directly influence standardized test scores, but are positive improvements for any school.

The teacher surveys also point out that not all teachers at this school site are thoroughly informed about the school’s standardized test scores. In actuality many of the staff members’ answers were contradictory to each other, showing that not all staff members are on the same page when it comes to the detracking of the school. Staff members did not seem to be very well informed about the different test scores for the different groups on campus. In order for a school to improve, its teachers need to be made aware of which students are struggling and with which content areas they are struggling in the most.

The teacher surveys also showed a negative perception of detracking at the school. When asked whether detracking improved the school culture, 43% of the teachers answered “no”. When asked if detracking helped raise either minority students or the general school population,
half of the teachers answered “no”. In order for a complete school transformation, all teachers need to be on board, therefore detracking at this school may not be as beneficial to this school as one where all of the teachers support detracking.

This study shows school administrators and leadership teams that detracking can help raise standardized test scores for their general school populations and for Hispanic-Latino students. It also shows that detracking is not the full solution for helping ELLs be successful in high school, but that they need more support and possibly different curricula choices than the general school population. The teachers surveyed also give insight to how teachers feel about detracking and the issues that could arise when the whole school’s staff is not in agreement about detracking.

Limitations

This case study had some limitations due to time. Not all of the teachers at the school were surveyed. Surveying all of the teachers would have given a clearer picture to how the whole staff feels about detracking and their perceptions of the school’s culture since detracking. The staff surveyed did not always give explanations for their answers. Having more detailed responses would have provided this study with more data to use in its analysis of detracking at the school site.

For privacy reasons, it was also not possible to get individualized student standardized test scores. Such data would have allowed for the tracking of students and how they were directly influenced by detracking. It would have also given a clearer picture of whether detracking actually helped students who would have been placed in lower-ability level classes. Having individualized student data may have also helped with understand why the numbers of ELLs fluctuated and why their test scores were inconsistent from year to year.
Recommendations

There have been many studies done on the negative consequences of tracking students. Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, & LePore (1995) explain that tracking can lead to the segregation with lower income and minority students filling up lower ability level classes, regardless of their actual ability levels. This segregation creates an achievement gap between the higher ability level students and the lower ability groups and does not give all students the ability to reach their full potential. Kershaw (1992) believes tracking discourages minority students from achieving their best and reinforces negative perceptions of what they can achieve. Callahan (2005) shares how ELLs are often placed in lower-ability classes because of their proficiency in English and how these low-ability level classes directly impact ELLs chances of attending universities later in their educational career. All of these studies show tracking can lead to negative consequences. There are not as many studies on the effects of detracking and whether these negative consequences can be mitigated through detracking.

This case study showed that detracking could help raise standardized test scores. For the school studied, standardized test scores on both the English Language Arts STAR proficiency and CAHSEE passing rates rose for the general school population and the minority group (Hispanic-Latinos) after detracking. For ELLs, the results were somewhat inconclusive. Right after detracking, ELLs proficiency and passing rates on both the English-Language Arts STAR and CAHSEE tests went up, but over the last two years the passing and proficiency rates have declined. Not only did some of the different groups’ standardized test scores go up, but some of the school’s teachers reported higher expectations for all students after detracking and a greater acceptance of all students in college preparatory classes.
Due to all of the negative consequences of tracking, the placement of heterogenous students into the same classroom seems to be the easiest solution. This case study shows detracking can help raise standardized test scores but that schools are complex systems where every decision can potentially affect student achievement. This study also showed that groups, such as ELLs or even Special Education students, need to be looked at individually and that one broad decision may not positively affect all students.
Bibliography


Appendix A: Survey Used to Collect Data

Hi Colleague,
I am not sure if you know, but I am currently working on a master’s thesis on the effects of detracking on student achievement. Part of my research is getting your opinion of how our students have been affected by the detracking of classes during the 2008-2009 school year. I would really appreciate you truthfully filling out this survey and anonymously placing it in my box. The more surveys I can get back, the more thorough I can be with the analysis of detracking and our school. I ask that you do not put your name on this survey, but do ask that you write the name of your department. This will help me classify the results. If you have any questions, please let me know.
Thank you very much for your time,
Alana Milton

Department: ____________________________  

Detracking Survey

1. What were the school’s standardized test scores (STAR/CAHSEE) like in the years prior to the detracking of students?

2. Do you believe detracking has helped your school raise all students’ standardized test scores? Please explain.

3. Do you believe detracking has helped raise minority students’ standardized test scores? Please explain.

4. Do you believe detracking has helped raise English Language Learners’ standardized test scores? Please explain.

5. Do you believe the school’s culture has changed since the detracking of the school? Why/why not?

Thank you again for your help!
## Appendix B, Survey Responses

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