

A Place at The Table for Every Child

Nancy Doda, Ph.D.
www.teacher-to-teacher.com
<http://www.allianceforpowerfullearning.com>

"Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery." - Horace Mann

Is public education the great equalizer?

Who Falls Through The Cracks?

¼ of students are at risk of school failure before they start:

- Nontraditional Learning Style
- Limited Prior Knowledge/Language
- Inadequate Sense of Potential
- Limited Exposure to Stimulating Conditions
- Race and Class

"A student's middle grades experience is critical to his or her life's chances. It is during the middle grades that students either launch toward achievement and attainment, or slide off track and placed on a path of frustration, failure, and, ultimately, early exit from the only secure path to adult success."

Balfanz, 2009

What do we do about
this?



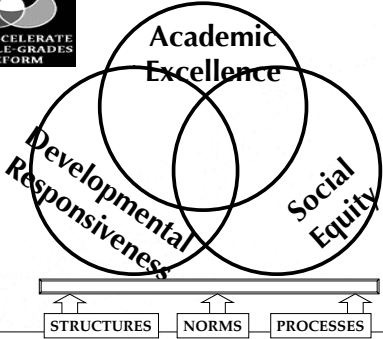
If this was the end in
mind...*but*

"The modern employee must be more highly educated, better informed, more flexible than ever before. He or she must be, because what we're paying for is the ability to think, to solve problems, to make informed judgments, to distinguish between right and wrong, to discern the proper course of action in situations and circumstances that are necessarily ambiguous." David Kearns, Xerox Corporation

21st Century Skills

- Think, Innovate and Work Creatively
- Reason Effectively
- Solve Problems and Make Sound Judgments
- Collaborate with Others
- Communicate Clearly
- Be Self-Directed

What must we do to prepare *all* children to live successfully in the world?



Our Goal: Create a school culture of high expectations and high support for every child.

“Educators in the middle grades make decisions that place students on trajectories that will have long-term consequences for their educational opportunities.” (Welner & Burris, in press)

Do Ability Grouping and Tracking Work?

Tracking Limits Opportunity & Exposure

- Opportunity and Exposure are the pathway to Equity:
- *“...regardless of ability, students will generally attain higher achievement in more-rigorous classes (Hallinan, 2000) Even students who fail in Advanced Placement courses have a better chance of earning a college degree, simply by virtue of having been exposed to a challenging curriculum (Adelman, 1999).*

Tracking Labels Students

“Labels teach students that if the school does not identify and label them as capable...they should not expect to do well later.” (Welner & Burris, in press)

Different is not Deficient

In spite of our best intentions...*we as teachers* are effected by the composition of our classes!

The Discrepancy: Classroom Life

Lower Tracks	Higher Tracks
• Classroom Management	• Optimism
• Lower Level Thinking	• More Critical Thinking, Reflection
• Seatwork Learning	• Active Learning
• Less Peer Cohesion	• Peer Cohesion

The Discrepancy: Learned Dispositions

<u>Low Ability Groups</u>	<u>High Ability Groups</u>
<i>Reliance on Others</i>	<i>Self- Reliance</i>
<i>Completion</i>	<i>Creativity</i>
<i>Low Level Thinking</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<i>Compliance</i>	<i>Decision-Making</i>

The Cracker Jack Theory



Equity in the Middle School

- Socially
- Best Curriculum *for All*
- Equity
- Engaging, Collaborative Instruction
 - Heterogeneous Class Composition
 - In-Class Skill Grouping
 - Growth as the Goal
-

“Sixth graders who signaled they were falling off the path typically remained in school for at least five more years. This indicates there is substantial time to intervene and that, despite years of struggle, students, perhaps with diminishing motivation, continue to attempt to participate and succeed in their schooling.”
(Balfanz, 2011)

The Best Curriculum

- Project-Based Learning
- Individual Research and Inquiry
- Collaborative Learning Models
- Rich, Meaningful Content
- Provocative Discussions
- Reflective Work

A Place to Start

- Steadily Reduce Ability Grouping
- Equalize the best curriculum we offer
- Balance Class Compositions
- Advance Project-Based Learning

“The primary moral obligation of any good school is to insure that no door for any child is ever closed before it can be opened.” (Doda, 2009)

The Hope

“What the best and wisest parent wants for his/her child, the educational community must want for all its children.” (John Dewey, 1930)