

Streaming and Marginalization in the Ontario Education System: A Problem of Practice

THESIS:

Academic streaming in Ontario secondary schools is an outdated and exclusionary practice that marginalizes students and stands in the way of a human rights based, and culturally representative, approach to education.

ABSTRACT: As educators, in dealing with disparities in schools/boards, and the ways in which educators combat various strategies, one can see why it is a teacher's intrinsic personal responsibility to bring attention to problems within their own practice. In the attempt to support individualized learning for each student, the Ontario public education system is designed to split students into either academic or applied categories. This problematic practice begins as early as kindergarten and can be maintained through the late stages of secondary school. This report sought to understand the inequities occurring within the streaming process as it currently stands. It is important to note that streaming can include specialty programs such as the Gifted Programme, vocational-led schooling models and specialty high skills majors (SHSM). Through careful observation, a list of tangible solutions and suggestions for implementing de-streaming has been created, to help eradicate deficit-based thinking models that disenfranchise and marginalize large populations of youth in Ontario.

METHODOLOGY: The authors looked into the history of streaming as it has been adapted over time, recorded site observations from placements in six school boards within the Greater Toronto Area and analyzed material from current academic documents and resources. The focus of the research is investigated through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy and an understanding of how this could effectively materialize within all Ontario classrooms at the present. This report sought to understand the inequities occurring within the streaming process as it currently stands. It is important to note that streaming can include specialty programs such as the Gifted Programme, vocational-led schooling models and specialty high skills majors (SHSM). Through careful observation, a list of tangible solutions and suggestions for implementing de-streaming has been created, to help eradicate deficit-based thinking models that disenfranchise and marginalize large populations of youth in Ontario.

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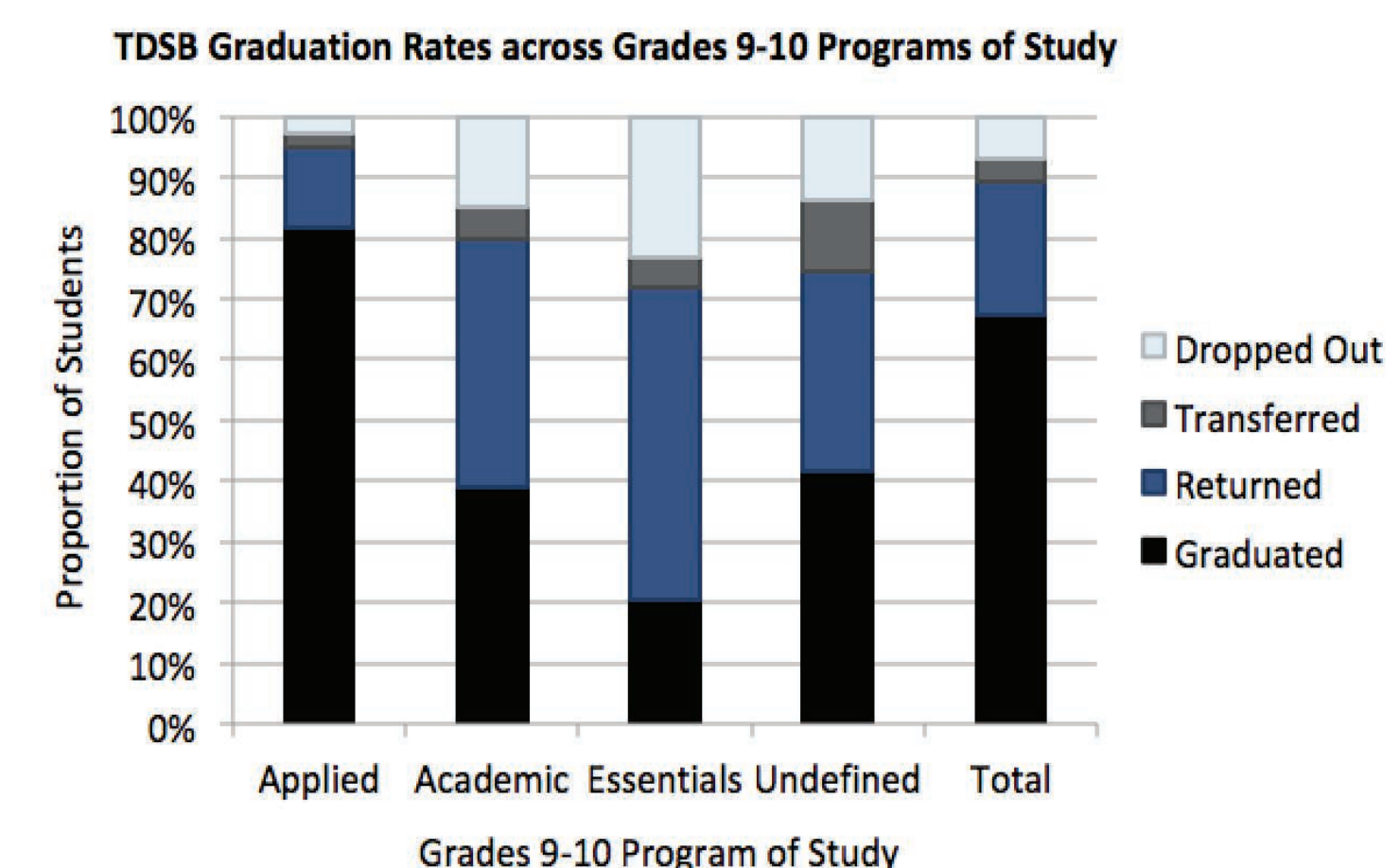


Image Citations: TDSB, December 2013. *Structured Pathways: An exploration of programs of study, school-wide and in-school programs, as well as promotion and transference across secondary schools in the TDSB.* pg 28 and pg. 21.

CONCLUSION: The negative effects of this problem of practice have been integrated into the Ontario education system since the 1990's. Our primary conclusion is that it is imperative to treat all students like the experts and young geniuses they are. Studies in every field show that we are now preparing students for jobs that do not yet exist in our age of technology. Therefore, streaming the way we have done does not make sense, even from an economic perspective. Allowing our students to interact and work with peers who are different from themselves gives them cause to collaborate together authentically without 'othering'. Our focus as equity educators needs to be fostering empathic capacity within our students, however, it begins with ourselves and the systems we work under.

TDSB Self-Identified Race Across Programs of Study – 2011/12

Race Across POS	Indigenous	Black	East Asian	Latin American	Middle Eastern	Mixed	South Asian	Southeast Asian	White
Applied	0.1%	8.8%	20.5%	1.7%	4.9%	6.6%	22.7%	4.7%	29.9%
Academic	0.7%	22.7%	10.5%	3.8%	7.9%	7.9%	16.9%	5.8%	23.8%
Essentials	1.2%	29.3%	5.1%	3.5%	7.6%	7%	15.9%	4%	26.5%
Undefined	0.4%	16.1%	21.6%	2.9%	8.1%	5.5%	16.7%	5.4%	23.3%
Totals	0.3%	12.6%	17.9%	2.2%	5.8%	6.9%	21%	4.9%	28.3%

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION: REMOVING THE SYSTEMIC ISSUE

1. Limit class sizes to 25 students
2. Bolster In-School and Community Supports
3. Generate Pre-Emptive Financing for Necessary Resources
4. Create and Support Ongoing Professional Development
5. Rework Educator Language to Remove Deficit Thinking
6. Utilize Evidence-based Instructional Strategies for Blended Classrooms
7. Differentiate Assessment Broadly to Support All Learners