

Position statement on streaming

In March, Collins (2017) reported that former University of Auckland professor, John Hattie, considered the practice of streaming in New Zealand schools was partly responsible for the nation's declining results in PISA (Programme for International Students' Assessment) assessments since they first began in 2000. In 2000 New Zealand was amongst the top countries in the world but its ratings have declined since then. Indeed Collins report states as one example, the New Zealand 2016 mathematics results for 15 year-olds have declined more than any other nation. However, in my view, blaming streaming for this is blaming the wrong circumstance for the decline. I consider there is another much more likely reason for the decline. Around 2000, the numeracy project was introduced into New Zealand schools and continues in use in most schools to the present day. I know that many competent teachers with expertise in mathematics have significant concerns about the project, as I also do. Streaming was widespread in New Zealand schools in 2000 when New Zealand 's mathematics scores were much better. The numeracy project was only just starting in selected primary schools, too early to have any impact on the PISA results. The higher-performing 15 year olds of 2000 had never been part of the numeracy project. The 15 year-olds who performed so poorly in the 2016 PISA assessment had been through up to 10 years in the numeracy project. It seems that Dr Hattie has overlooked the obvious in his comments on the declining PISA results in mathematics, and perhaps in other areas as well.

Unlike Dr Hattie, students I interviewed last year in the top Year 9 class in a high-performing, streamed, state boys' secondary school, stated that they enjoyed working in a streamed environment and that it helped them to achieve highly. Indeed, streaming was the most frequently identified element of schooling considered to have contributed to the students' high achievement. Twenty of the 31 boys interviewed specifically stated this was a reason for their success. They believed that, by being grouped with students of similar ability their learning was enhanced. They described the environment in their class as both competitive and supportive. For them, it seemed, their current school was the most competitive environment they had encountered in their schooling to date and they enjoyed this. Appreciation was expressed for having the opportunity to cover two years of content in one year in some subjects in order to start their NCEA qualification a year early (Miller 2017). This research concurs with data gathered anecdotally in my role as Dean of Advanced Learning Programmes in a secondary school for seven years. Both academically high-achieving students and their parents/caregivers love streaming. In contrast to streaming being the major element enhancing student achievement, lack of challenge in primary and/or intermediate school was considered by 18 students to be the most significant hindrance to achievement. It seems this hindrance was immediately overcome in the streamed environment of the boys' secondary school (Miller, 2017).

My research and experience as Dean of Advanced Learning Programmes in a secondary school have persuaded me that streaming works well and is beneficial for the intellectually gifted and academically talented. The voices of students, and their parents/caregivers need to be heard in the midst of those who would

criticise streaming on the basis of ideology rather than carefully conducted research.

References

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