An Investigation and Description of Teacher Behavior in High-Track and Low-Track English Classes

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

AN INVESTIGATION AND DESCRIPTION OF TEACHER BEHAVIOR
IN HIGH-TRACK AND LOW-TRACK ENGLISH CLASSES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

DOROTHY C. SIEVERT

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Tracking or ability grouping has once again become an important issue in educational settings as evidenced by the dedication of an entire issue of *Educational Leadership* entitled “Untracking for Equity” in October of 1992. Even though ability grouping remains the predominant instructional organization in secondary schools today, there are research findings that indicate that this may be doing psychological harm to our students as well as resegregating the schools because poor, minority students are often overrepresented in low tracks, while middle-class, white students are overrepresented in high tracks. (Goodlad, 1984; Oakes, 1985; Trimble and Sinclair, 1987; Casten, 1990; Gursky, 1990) The tracking system has become an established and accepted method of school organization despite the fact that it is assigning millions of minority and economically disadvantaged children to poor academic preparation, poor teachers, and poor curriculums.

How has tracking become such an established and accepted method of school organization? This system may have started as early as the 1800’s in the one-room school when teachers divided the classes into those who could
and could not read. (Nevi, 1987) Wide-spread practice began at the turn of the century when the United States saw an influx of southern and eastern European immigrants bringing different languages and cultures to the schools. By the 1960's, Conant reported 96.5 percent of the principals in comprehensive schools of medium size grouped students by ability in one or more academic subjects. (Conant, 1967)

In 1988, it was estimated that 90 percent of ninth graders were grouped in classes according to ability. (Warren, 1988) Researchers estimated that 75 percent of elementary and secondary schools today use some form of ability grouping. (Trimble and Sinclair, 1987) This grouping starts as early as first grade when classes are divided into three groups for reading. At this early age, groupings are supposed to be based on ability, but actually are based on home and family situation and especially the level of schooling of the parents. (Goodlad and Oakes, 1988) When grouping starts early in elementary school, small differences in ability become more pronounced until children reach junior high school and teachers are confronted by an enormous range of academic achievement. The only recourse is to continue previous tracking levels to accommodate this wide range of ability. High school administrators now face the dilemma of whether to attempt to restructure the schools and how best to do this in light of research findings condemning the widespread use of ability grouping.
Four basic steps in the sorting of students for these tracked classes have been suggested. First, the student is identified publicly as to intellectual capacities and separated into groups. Next, the groups are labelled openly and characterized in the minds of teachers as to type. The student is defined by others in terms of group type. Finally, the student is treated by and experiences school very differently as a result of the grouping. (Oakes, 1985)

Ability grouping has been perpetuated by educators based on a number of assumptions that today are being questioned. Trimble suggests two, "First, students are considered to differ so greatly in their academic ability and capacity for learning that widely varied educational experiences are needed. Second, classes are seen as more manageable when students are homogeneously grouped." (Trimble, 1987, p. 15) Oakes suggests several assumptions that she hears most often: slower students feel more positive about themselves when in homogeneous groups, students learn better when they are grouped with other students who are considered to be like them academically, and placement processes are accurate and fair. (Oakes, 1985)

Research findings simply do not substantiate these assumptions. Oakes cites research proving that the tracking process fosters lowered self-esteem among teenagers in lower tracks and that no group of students has been found to benefit consistently from being in a homogeneous group. As to placement, 83 percent of the districts surveyed in a 1970 study used achieve-
ment and/or IQ tests as a basis for sorting students. Oakes does admit that one assumption, that teaching is easier with homogeneous groups, is more difficult to set aside, but that it is not worth the social price we pay for it. (Oakes, 1985)

Almost every researcher notes the differences that they have observed between the way that the different ability groups are taught. Teachers have different expectations in regard to homework, academic demands, analytical skills, creativity, independent thinking, and acceptable behavior. In observed teaching behaviors, researchers note that the high-track teachers are clearer in their expectations, more concerned about students, more enthusiastic, less punitive, and generally more experienced and better teachers. Teachers of high tracks seek independent thinking behavior while low-track teachers seek conforming class behavior. (Goodlad, 1984) Teachers' attitudes affect how they interact with their students, what materials are chosen for the class, and the social climate of the classroom. Studies have shown that low-ability reading groups spend more time on decoding tasks while high-ability reading groups were focused on unlocking meaning. Teachers interrupted poor readers more often than they interrupted good readers who made the same oral reading miscues. Lower classes spent more time on oral reading while high-ability groups spent more time on silent reading. (Harp, 1989)
Page observed in low-track and regular-track high school classrooms with the stated purpose of understanding tracking without evaluating whether it was good or bad. As a participant-observer, she noted wide differences in participation structure, climate, instructional practices, classroom management, and curriculum between the two tracks. She found that teachers structured regular-track lessons to promote students' engagement with academic subject matter and skills, but they structured lower-track lessons for control. In regular classes, there was debate and discussion, but lower classes were notable for the absence of talk. The classroom climate was relaxed, academic, and orderly in regular-track classes, but chaotic and disorderly in lower-track classes. The participation structures also varied, with frequently shifting and unclearly marked structures in lower-track classes. (Page, 1991)

Trimble and Sinclair (1987) paint a grim picture of the tracking system. They document marked differences in the amount of time devoted to instruction, homework assigned, and discipline problems in class. They reported that nearly 26 percent of the students in low-track classes said that daily routines or getting students to behave took up more class time than did learning. In addition, they found significant differences in course goals and in instructional methods. Low-track classes were exposed to a smaller variety of materials and were marked by a greater degree of classroom organization. High-track classes were taught by teachers who expressed themselves more clearly. It is
no wonder that the differences in ability grow every year when the high-track classes have the best teachers, the best curriculum, and the most motivated students.

Many educators today are speaking out about the dangers of the tracking system. Mary Futrell, President of the NEA, warned that in some schools, children on the low tracks do not get a solid academic education. She explained, “Kids at the top are reading Socrates, and kids at the bottom are reading Superman. For kids at the top, the emphasis is on creativity. For kids at the bottom, the emphasis is on discipline and conformity.” (Warren, 1988, p. B8) Goodlad emphasized the same point when he said that, “The central problem for today and tomorrow is no longer access to school. It is access to knowledge for all. The true challenge is that of assuring both equity and quality in school programs.” (International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement, 1987, p. 102)

A number of researchers point out that tracking prejudices how much children will benefit from instruction and results in the low-track child’s absence from places where academically and socially valued subjects are taught. (Goodlad and Oakes, 1988; Nevi, 1987) Thus, the student assigned to a low-track class has already been denied access to what is referred to as high status knowledge or the knowledge that provides access to the university and that creates a productive member of society. (Nevi, 1987) On the subject of
curriculum, one study reports, "The curriculum adopted for a given class sets boundaries on the attainments of individual students by determining the content to which they will be exposed and therefore the learning opportunities afforded them." (IAEEA, 1987, p. 103)

Slavin (1987) notes that teachers have lower expectations of low-track students and that the instructional pace is much slower.

Oakes has done a great deal of research and written widely on the issue of tracking. In her article with Goodlad, she expanded her definition of tracking as, "The separation of students into curriculum patterns wherein the courses taken by different students vary widely in expectations, teacher enthusiasm, teaching methods, classroom ambience, and content." (1988)

It was these research findings that have prompted this researcher's interest in investigating and describing teacher behavior in low-track and high-track classes. Unless administrators and supervisors can recognize and gain insight into the teacher behaviors that lead to academic success and student achievement, they will not be able to assist teachers to analyze and improve their own classroom behaviors. Gamoran (1987) issued a challenge to future researchers to "examine the ties between tracking, instruction and learning with more precise information about what actually goes on in classrooms." (Gamoran, 1987, p. 153) In the fall of 1993, this researcher began the field work to answer that challenge.
Very few researchers see an end to the tracking system because it is so firmly entrenched in the educational organization of the American school system. Goodlad stated, “This practice is so embedded and has proven so intransigent that it is more likely to be settled by courts than by persuasion.” (Goodlad, 1984, p. 297)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to improve supervision by describing differences in teacher behavior with different ability groups of students. The intent is to explore and investigate through participant observation and personal interviews how teacher behaviors change when dealing with students in different tracks. The follow-up interviews with both the teachers and their immediate supervisors focus on the five research questions as well as questions about how the supervisor and the school can best prepare the teacher for teaching students in the different ability groups. In one synthesis of research, the writer states, “Most research on grouping and achievement has failed to consider how students were treated after they were assigned to their classes.” (Gamoran, 1992, p. 13) This study attempts to document what is happening inside these ability-grouped classrooms. The study used concepts from the Phi Delta Kappa TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement) interaction model to document the classroom interactions.
The researcher believed this study would show significant differences in teaching behaviors because for years this researcher has worked with teachers who have stated, "You can't teach Romeo and Juliet to a basic level student." This attitude strongly influences the classroom materials chosen as teachers pre Judge what each level of student can do. Therefore, the basic student never comes into contact with a curriculum which enables them to advance to the university level and develop the thinking and analytical skills necessary to get there. This information is of critical importance to understanding why some students are denied their right to be members of a creative, interesting, and thought-provoking classroom situation. If teachers have low expectations for their performance, spend class time on discipline matters, assign students to seatwork, ask only lower-level thinking questions, and assess student on basic knowledge through rote learning, then how can these students succeed? Teachers clearly project to each student through body language, facial expressions, and comments exactly how they feel towards each student. These reactions are internalized by students and affect their self-concept and expectations for success both in class and in school in general. Classroom teachers play pivotal roles in creating a classroom climate which both stimulates every student to achieve their personal best and supports development of their self-concept. Students will achieve only to the
level expected and this can have a devastating effect on students assigned to
low-track classrooms.

The importance of the study is that many school administrators are
currently trying to deal with the present system of tracking or ability grouping
that has caused such unequal access to knowledge and unequal success rates
among their students. Goodlad and Oakes suggest a change in this system will
require a great deal of preparation, considerable dialogue about what equity
means, a plan of action, extensive data collection about tracking practices,
critical reflection about values and assumptions, and liberal experimentation
with organizational and instructional processes. (Goodlad and Oakes, 1988)
It is a considerable challenge, but it will be repaid by a generation of students
who achieve better, have high self-esteem, and can work cooperatively with
people of all races. These are goals which American schools currently espouse,
but which have been put “off track” by the well-intentioned, but insidiously
harmful ability grouping system.

Assumptions and Delimitations

Assumptions are that differences in teacher behaviors towards students
in different ability groups exist and that teachers will answer honestly during
the interview and will act normally when being observed in classrooms.
Delimitations are that teachers are usually on their best behavior when being observed and that students tend to do the same. This “halo effect” may be a problem when the teachers are answering the interview questions. Another delimitation is the inclusion of only one or two teachers per building. A full range of teachers was not available because of departmental scheduling. Requiring that the teacher teach Freshman lower-track English and higher-track English made it very difficult to find the required numbers of teachers and some very inexperienced teachers had to be included. Another delimitation is that observations in four different buildings with different philosophies and scheduling constraints as well as different student populations also affected the data collection activities. The size of the study is not large since observations will only include five teachers in four buildings. This made any generalization limited to statistically similar samples. A final delimitation is that the researcher has developed, over time, a bias against tracking and care was taken to document observations without the bias affecting the results obtained during the conduct of the study.

Research Questions

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. Are there observable teacher behavior differences in the way a teacher interacts with different ability groups of students?
2. Are there different instructional techniques chosen by the teacher to use with the different ability groups?

3. Are there differences in communication styles, both verbal and nonverbal, used by teachers with different ability groups?

4. Are there differences in the amount of time spent on actual instruction in the different ability groups?

5. Are there classroom climate differences in the different ability groups?

**Definition of Terms**

*Ability Grouping or Tracking:* An operational definition of ability grouping is grouping students by ability or achievement. Oakes defines it as “the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes.” (Oakes, 1985, p. 3) She and Goodlad later revised her definition, “The separation of students into curriculum patterns wherein the courses taken by different students vary widely in expectations, teacher enthusiasm, teaching methods, classroom ambience, and content.” (Goodlad and Oakes, 1988, p. 18)

*Communication:* that dynamic process by which a person “consciously or unconsciously affects the cognition of another through materials or agencies used in symbolic ways.” (Anderson, 1972, p. 5)
Classroom Climate: the classroom psychosocial characteristics that affect the setting in which human behavior occurs. These characteristics may include level of thought processes, focus which involves how the group and teacher interact and work together, and affective dimensions including excitement and involvement of students, warmth, tolerance, and openness.

Observable Teacher Behaviors: behaviors of the teacher in interacting with the students in the classroom. These include methods of feedback such as affirmation, praise, reasons for praise, and accepting feelings; personal regard as evidenced by proximity, courtesy, compliments, and methods of correction; and response opportunities which include individual helping, wait time, rephrasing, and the level of questioning. (Kerman and Martin, 1980)
Page (1991) wrote an educational ethnography of eight lower-track classes in two comprehensive high schools that provides detailed descriptions and a case study about the meaning of the school curriculum and the dynamics of lower-track classrooms as compared to regular-track classrooms. She used a double comparison research design: comparing regular- and lower-track classes within each high school and also across the two schools. She documents the ambiguous rather than clear-cut meaning that tracking has for the teachers and students who encounter it most directly. She details the dynamics and circumstances in which teachers and students construct lower-track lessons. She argues that tracking is a red herring and that the real issue is the degree to which society is committed to educating all children, not merely the most promising.

In her chapter on what teachers do, Page (1991) describes the striking differences she observed in the way that teachers structure and interact with their lower-track and regular-track classes. In regular-track classes, the
student’s role is one of relaxed intellectual endeavor with lessons designed to promote students’ engagement and debate and the emphasis on teaching of critical thinking skills. In contrast, the lower-track classes are notable for the absence of talk of any kind. Students do individualized worksheets on noncontroversial topics, watch films, and read silently most of the time. The teachers structure the lessons for control because they fear that the students will get out of control, even though disagreements are quite uncommon in the lower-track classes. She also notes important climate differences between the relaxed, academic, orderly regular-track classes and the chaotic and disorderly lower-track classes. She stresses that teachers and students produce the chaos together. Another area of difference is in the participation structure chosen by the teacher. In lower-track classes, the structure shifts more often and with less-clear marking; thus creating confusion and ambiguity. In contrast, in the regular-track classes, the teacher establishes one participation structure during a class period during which the teacher and the whole class generally explore an academic topic together verbally. As to curricular topics, she found the lower-track classes emphasized the broad tropics, but at a slower pace, in less depth, or by using elementary school materials and games.

Trimble and Sinclair (1987) report significant differences in curricular content with students in average and low tracks having few opportunities to learn socially valued content material. There are marked differences in the
amount of time devoted to instruction. Higher-track students are expected to do more homework while lower-track students have not only fewer academic demands on them, but actually spend less time on learning because of behavioral problems in the classroom. They report that nearly 26 percent of the students in the low-track classes said that daily routines or getting students to behave took up more class time than did learning! In addition, the course goals reflect that high-track students are expected to exhibit a higher level of analytical skills and knowledge while low-track students only have to learn basic knowledge and cognitive skills through rote learning. To compound the problems, they found significant differences in instructional methods. Low-track classes were exposed to a smaller variety of materials and were marked by a greater degree of classroom organization. High-track classes were taught by teachers who expressed themselves more clearly, perhaps because it is common practice in schools to allow the more experienced and better teachers to teach the upper-track classes, thus leaving the more difficult to manage low-track classes to the inexperienced, new teacher or the poor teacher.

Trimble and Sinclair provide a compelling number of reasons why the tracking system should be discontinued. First of all, detrimental effects on the low-tracked students have been verified in a 1975 study which showed an overall decrease in IQ scores for low-track students. Secondly, ability grouping lessens dignity and self-worth in all but the highest groups. Third, high-track
students tend to limit their friends to others in their track, thus increasing arrogance and elitism. Fourth, segregation of students along racial and socio-economic lines results from grouping because minority and economically disadvantaged children are represented in low-track classes in unwarranted numbers. Fifth, there is no evidence that grouping has a positive influence on learning of any group but the highest, with the lower level children often performing more poorly in homogeneous groups. Sixth, low-track students develop negative attitudes towards school and themselves.

Goodlad and Oakes (1988) add to the list that tracking prejudices how much children will benefit from instruction and results in the low-track child’s absence from places where academically and socially valued subjects are taught. These students may never have the chance to learn a second language, algebra, or world literature. They also add that tracking underestimates what the child can do and severely restricts his access to knowledge.

On the subject of curriculum, a National Report on the Second International Mathematics Study states, “The curriculum adopted for a given class sets boundaries on the attainments of individual students by determining the content to which they will be exposed and therefore the learning opportunities afforded them.” (IAEEA, 1987, p. 103) Thus, the student assigned to a low-track class has already been denied access to what Charles Nevi (1987) refers
to as high status knowledge or the knowledge that provides access to the university and that creates a productive member of society.

Slavin (1987) sees most of the above limitations of the tracking system and adds that low-track students have poor peer models because they are denied being in class with brighter students. He points out that teachers have lower expectations of low-track students and that the instructional pace is much slower.

In general, Slavin (1988) sees ability grouping plans as beneficial only if they incorporate the following features: (1) Students remain in heterogeneous classes most of the day and are regrouped by performance level only in such subjects as reading and mathematics. (2) The grouping plan reduces heterogeneity in the specific skill being taught. (3) Group assignments are flexible and frequently reassessed. (4) Teachers adapt their level and pace of instruction in regrouped classes to accommodate students’ levels of readiness and learning rates.

Warren (1988), education writer for The New York Times, laments that potential is stifled in low-track classes and that a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs as students achieve only to the level expected of them. He also warns of a peer value system that develops in these classes in which learning and studying have no great value.
Goodlad (1984) cites studies that show there to be lower self-esteem, more school misconduct, higher drop-out rates, and higher delinquency among students in lower tracks. Their placement also affects whether students plan to go to college and whether they will be accepted over and beyond the effects of aptitude and grades.

Nevi (1987) supports tracking and gives several reasons why tracking has become a tradition in the American educational system. In addition to being easier to teach, he sees homogeneous grouping as one method to search for a better match between learner and instructional environment and a common way to attempt to provide for individual differences. He also points out that guidelines for certain federal funds require that students be grouped for the purpose of different specialized instruction. He cites the Kulik studies which show that students seemed to like their school subjects more when they studied with peers of similar ability. This study also reports that some students in grouped classes even developed more positive attitudes about themselves and about school. He sees grouping beneficial in a lower social class school where the high ability students could be placed in a context to promote academic standards and norms of behavior that might not be widespread throughout the school. Even Nevi, however, does not endorse tracking universally. He distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate tracking. Appropriate tracking: (1) offers the student access to high-status
knowledge; (2) has the same expectations for all students and uses low-level tracking only for remediation and upgrading; (3) structures the situation so that students' special needs and abilities can be recognized and considered; and (4) has a good instructional climate which motivates students toward attaining high-status knowledge. Inappropriate tracking assumes that low-track students are not capable of acquiring high-status knowledge and provides them with an alternative curriculum not leading to this knowledge.

Kulik and Kulik (1987) employed meta-analytic methods to review previous studies, especially those done by Slavin. They urge caution about accepting all of Slavin's generalizations, but they did find support for the assertion that grouping can be a powerful tool in the education of gifted and talented students. In these groups, studies report effects on achievement that were moderate in size. In lower groups, their analyses showed that the benefits were very small for comprehensive grouping programs.

Berliner (1985) states that ability grouping increases diversity rather than reducing it. He urges educators to consider the price paid by the low-ability students to be carefully compared to the advantages that high-ability students might gain. He warns of the effects each year of the small differences in ability used to divide the children originally as the differences become greater and greater and the educational opportunities become less and less for the low-track student.
Harp's article (1989) reports research that notes differences in the ways teachers interacted with low-ability and high-ability groups. He observed that low-ability groups were directed to spend much more time on decoding tasks while high-ability groups were focused on unlocking meaning. Low-ability groups spent more time on oral reading while high-ability groups spent more time on silent reading. Teachers interrupted poor readers more often than they interrupted good readers who made the same oral reading miscues.

Harp (1989) suggests the following directions for the teacher: (1) Children should not be assigned to classrooms on the basis of ability or achievement. (2) Ability grouping within a grade level does not yield sufficient results to outweigh the possible risks to self concept. (3) While cross-grade grouping has been shown to result in learning gains, these gains must be carefully measured against the limitations imposed by having a group of children only for reading instruction. This makes curriculum integration and thematic teaching virtually impossible. (4) Ability grouping should be avoided because it results in less instructional time and less learning for low-ability groups. (5) The differential treatment afforded by low groups and high groups by teachers indicates that such grouping should be avoided. (6) Permanent groups based on ability or achievement should not be formed in classrooms. (7) Assignment to an instructional group should depend on an instructional need at a given point in time. (8) Teachers cannot assume that a
group formed for a specific instructional need will share a future instructional need.

It seems imperative to stop the traditional tracking system as soon as possible, but what do we replace it with? Goodlad and Oakes (1988) suggest a curriculum organized around central concepts of the disciplines and grounded in real-life experiences. The knowledge must be important, challenging, complex, and rich with meaning. Students should be clustered in small groups exchanging ideas and helping each other learn. Teacher talk must not dominate and the teacher should function like an orchestra conductor. They believe that black and Hispanic children will learn better under such conditions. They cite a conceptually rich, experience-based, cooperative bilingual science curriculum developed by Edward DeAvila and Elizabeth Cohen as an example of what will work. They also urge, “Most important, we must rid ourselves of the dangerous notion that individual differences, such as in interests and rate of learning, call for substantially differentiated curriculums.” (Goodlad and Oakes, 1988, p. 19)

Oakes (1992) suggests that probably 80 percent of the secondary schools and 60 percent of the elementary schools still use some form of between-class grouping. She is concerned that in all of those forms of grouping, educators make some rather global judgment about how smart students are and how well children are likely to learn. She states that the top-
track classes are marked by experience-based learning, hands-on and critical thinking activities while the bottom track is dominated by strategies that are passive such as worksheets. She sees part of the reason that instruction is so different for these students being that teachers who are most likely to be assigned to low-track classes are the least experienced or have the lowest level of preparation in their subject field. These teachers have less confidence and a smaller repertoire to offer their classes which are often filled with students who have a history of school difficulties, school failures, or misbehavior.

Oakes (1992) attacks the idea that ability is fixed very early in life and that there's nothing that schools can do to alter a student's capability. She suggests, "It comes down to rethinking our notions of who can learn. If we took seriously the idea that all students can really be smart, we wouldn't ration opportunities so early in the school experience." (Oakes, 1992, p. 21) She suggests a curriculum that is richer, more problem-oriented, and more engaging for all students.

Flexible grouping, where students are placed in temporary groups based on their level of independence as learners and where groups are formed and reformed to engage in a variety of tasks, may be part of the answer according to Harp (1989). He suggests cooperative learning groups which are heterogeneous groups of four or five students who work together on team
tasks and are rewarded on the basis of the group's overall performance. He suggests a model which includes teacher instruction, team practice to master the lesson, individual assessments, and team recognition wherein each student's score is averaged with the rest of the team to produce team scores. The basic idea is to motivate individuals to help other group members learn. Thus, cooperation is highlighted and competition is eliminated within the group.

Gursky (1990) comes to much the same conclusion when he suggests that managing a more diverse group of pupils in mixed groupings requires innovative approaches such as cooperative learning, small-group work, peer tutoring, and team teaching. He also points out that educators and civil rights activists have been decrying the overrepresentation of blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans in the low-level remedial and vocational classes and the corresponding lack of minority students in the college-prep honors tracks.

Slavin (1987) also proposes cooperative learning as an effective alternative to tracking. He states that cooperative learning methods have an integrative effect since students from different ethnic backgrounds work together cooperatively on a routine basis. Thus these groups have positive effects on intergroup relations as well as on student achievement.

Muskin (1990) argues that educators must explore the potent connections among school setting, ability grouping, teaching methods, and student opportunity to learn. She believes that her study raises questions concerning
the equitable distribution of opportunity to learn and critical skills such as discussion and writing. She concludes that basic level classes seem unusually difficult to manage and educators should question the policy of grouping such students together. She believes a more equitable distribution of opportunity to learn requires upgrading the skills of some teachers, reorienting the priorities and resources of certain schools, and reexamining the ramifications of ability grouping structures.

Byrne (1988) examined adolescent self-concept, ability grouping, and social comparison in a paper presented at the American Psychological Association. She was interested in the social comparison that plays such a role in self-concept development of adolescents. Her results suggest students in the low track use the high track as a referential yardstick against which to judge their own academic abilities. In so doing, they perceive themselves as less capable. However, they do not place a high value on the attainment of academic ability and consider popularity within their own friendship cliques as more worthwhile.

Poppish (1990) suggests tracking students on the secondary level may not only be discriminatory, but also counterproductive to the personal, educational, and economic potential of all students. She cites a study in which mid- and upper-tracks of students for English and Social Studies classes were integrated. Evaluations based on student surveys and faculty observations concluded that students experienced a high degree of self-esteem, had a
positive perception of the learning environment, and showed an increased level of motivation. Teachers also observed a decrease in the gap between the performance and stigmatized roles of the mid- and upper-level student and stated that they preferred heterogeneous groups.

Spencer and Allen (1988) suggest that to change grouping practices, concurrent changes must be made in the design of schedules, curriculum, and instruction. They stress that of all of the research findings related to heterogeneous grouping, none is more important than the fact that all students learn best in classes where the ability level is average or higher.

Wilkinson's discussion on the grouping of low-achieving students for instruction, particularly the implications of the research for educating Chapter 1 students concludes that homogeneous ability grouping is detrimental to learning of students assigned to low groups. Teachers should not be reluctant to reassign students to groups or alter the groups. Heterogeneous ability, all-student groups and some variants to cooperative learning may be effective for both low- and high-achieving students. Teachers should be knowledgeable about the variety of grouping practices and be able to use them. Students should learn how to interact effectively in small groups. Instruction and assistance should be appropriate to the student's level and skills. (Wilkinson, 1986)
Tesh and Jaeger concluded in their 1990 paper that the summarized effects of "bona fide" homogeneous grouping for all children regardless of race were detrimental. Their findings suggest the assignment of students on the basis of homogeneous grouping may be questionable.

In his overview article for *Educational Leadership*, Brandt discusses tracking's main disadvantage as being the different curriculums that are "...depriving some students of the opportunity to learn the most valuable content." (Brandt, 1992, p. 5) He continued:

Educators often say we want students to become whatever they are capable of becoming. In fact, researchers have found, we ourselves decide very early what each child is capable of.

After that, our curriculum and instruction help confirm our own self-fulfilling prophecies. (p. 5)

Wheelock (1992) described what she has found as clues to the process of untracking and lessons for others considering alternatives to tracking. She identified nine ingredients after a study of 250 middle schools: (1) They believe that all students can learn and that the goal of untracking is improved learning for all students. (2) They believe in change as a comprehensive process that touches every aspect of school life. (3) Norms of high expectations and inclusion into the entire fabric of school life are woven in for all students, including special education and culturally diverse students. This includes the
belief that persistent effort rather than inborn ability is a precursor to success in life and the basis for life-long learning. (4) The principals involve a variety of constituents in the decision-making process and foster conditions for risk-taking among their staff. (5) The value of parent involvement is emphasized and parents are involved and educated about alternatives to tracking. (6) Supportive district- or state-level policies encourage schools to untrack. (7) Due to the complexity of change required for successful heterogeneous grouping, many schools adopt timetables that span three to seven years. (8) Focused professional development such as goal-setting and team-building exercises or a review of “high expectations” teaching strategies, sometimes using the TESA program, implement the desired reform. (9) Finally, untracking schools recognize that reform does not happen overnight and thus introduce alternatives in stages. Schools may start by merging the bottom tracks into the middle tracks, by beginning at the lowest grade level, by department, or by teams. Wheelock answers the question of whether it is worth the effort by stating, “In untracking schools, achievement is up for ‘low’ and ‘average’ students, while undiminished and sometimes improved for ‘high’ students. Untracking schools cite improvements in discipline, school climate, and teacher morale.” (Wheelock, 1992, p. 10)

Gamoran (1992) offers an excellent synthesis of research on tracking in which he discusses whether ability grouping is equitable. He concludes that
grouping, as currently practiced, typically leads to inequitable outcomes, especially for high school tracking. He cites one national survey of 20,000 U.S. high school students which showed that achievement gaps between students in different tracks widened more than the overall disparity between students who dropped out of school after 10th grade and those who stayed in school. His own 1987 study revealed that the difference in achievement between tracks exceeded the difference in achievement between students and dropouts. He concludes, "This means that which program a student pursued in high school mattered more for achievement than whether or not he or she was in school!" (Gamoran, 1992, p. 12)

Gamoran (1992) laments that most research on grouping has failed to consider how students were treated in the classroom. He concludes that the different effects reported by other researchers may be the result of where and how the grouping was implemented. If teaching quality favored one group or another, that would lead to outcomes that differed by group. He cites a number of case studies that suggest that the quality of instruction and the climate for learning favors high-level groups and honors classes over low groups and remedial classes. He discusses unequal instruction as well as differences in context and climate at the secondary level. College-track students take more academic courses than students in other tracks, thus contributing to their academic advantage. Observers report that high-track
teachers are more enthusiastic and spend more time preparing. Teachers compete to teach the honors and accelerated classes, so those with more experience or better reputations win the privilege. Problem solving and critical thinking are more likely to occur in high tracks. In contrast, low-track instruction tends to be fragmented, emphasizing worksheets and recitation with more time spent on behavior management.

In an earlier paper, Gamoran (1987) challenged researchers, “Future research must examine the ties between tracking, instruction, and learning with more precise information about what actually goes on in classrooms.” (Gamoran, 1987, p. 153)

Gamoran (1992) concludes that while the research is not definitive, it suggests two actions: reduce the use of tracking and improve the way it is used where it is retained. He suggests that low-track classes may serve their remedial purpose if teachers hold high expectations, emphasize academic work, exert extra effort, and provide opportunities for extensive oral interaction between teachers and students. There should be no procedure in place that assigns weak or less-experienced teachers to the lower track.

Rowan and Miracle (1983) focused on two alternative explanations to explain the effects of ability grouping on achievement: the differential peers hypothesis developed in studies of high school tracking and the differential instruction hypothesis which grew out of teacher expectation research in
elementary schools. The first hypothesis stresses that the ability grouping stratified peer contexts in schools which in turn affected educational outcomes. The second hypothesis stresses that teachers produced achievement differentials in grouping systems by treating students in higher ranking instructional groups more favorably than students in low ranking groups. Their study in the elementary schools concludes that there is little evidence that achievement differentials arise from a pattern of differential peer influence. As to the differential instruction hypothesis, they do find a pattern of differential instruction. They found that students in lower ability classrooms were paced more slowly than students in higher ability classrooms, and, since pacing affects achievement, this form of grouping apparently leads to instruction that reinforces initial achievement differentials. Interestingly, they found that while the tracking system worked to the disadvantage of students in lower ability classrooms, the system of grouping within classrooms apparently worked in a compensatory fashion due to more direct interaction with teachers. They conclude that there was clear evidence that group rank affected the way students were taught. They also state that the data does confirm prior research demonstrating direct grouping effects on achievement with students in higher groups obtaining an achievement advantage over students in lower groups by virtue of their group placement.
Finley (1984) conducted a case study of the tracking system in one academic department in a comprehensive high school. She noted a competition among teachers for high-status students and concluded that teachers actually shape and maintain tracking in their efforts to negotiate the institutional context. In this study, part-time teachers and new teachers often teach only low-track classes. Only by being assertive and making friends in the department can new teachers improve their schedules over time. This causes ill will and competition among faculty members who accuse each other of unfair politicking. She found that the teachers with high-track classes tend to be the most energetically involved in beyond-the-classroom curricular matters, such as participating in workshops, taking courses, and preparing curricula for the district. They are also more involved in departmental and school affairs. Most importantly, they acquire good reputations with the top students and their parents. Teachers who have only low-track classes are quite ambivalent about their positions in the tracking hierarchy and see this as a sign that they are not esteemed by administrators or fellow teachers. They may even doubt their own qualifications to teach the high-tracked classes and this sense of competence suffers with repeated exposure to low-track classes. She points out that this study shows that while the low-track students remain at the bottom of the status hierarchy, their teachers remain there with them and share their demoralization.
Eder's (1981) study of first-grade reading group assignments indicates that learning contexts varied dramatically across ability groups with students in low groups instructed in an environment characterized by disruption from the teacher as well as from the other members, while high group members were instructed in a much less disruptive environment. She sees ability grouping as a self-fulfilling prophecy in which there is very little mobility across groups and a practice that should be questioned. She suggests heterogeneous grouping as an alternative.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The purpose of the study was to improve supervision by describing differences in teacher behavior with different ability groups of students. The study had a qualitative design with the intent to explore and investigate how the teacher behaviors changed when dealing with students in high- and low-track English classes. The study had an ethnographic paradigm in which the researcher immersed herself in the setting as a participant observer and followed up with personal interviews with the teachers and their supervisors.

The researcher identified teachers who taught high- and low-track Freshman English classes by calling the principals or assistant principals of suburban high schools and asking them for their help in identifying teachers whose teaching schedules fit the parameters of the study. They also contacted the individual teachers and asked them if they would agree to be included in the study. Freshman English classes were selected for the study because public school students are required to take this course. The individual teachers were then contacted by the researcher and dates for the classroom observa-
tions were mutually agreed upon. Each teacher was observed during five days of instruction in two of the teacher's classes, one high-ability and one low-ability group. Intensive field notes were taken by the researcher during the classes to document the teacher-student interaction process in terms of descriptive and observational research. After the fifth day of observation, the teacher was interviewed by the researcher. This interview was audiotaped. The supervisor of the teacher was also interviewed. The supervisor was asked the same seven questions as the teacher had been asked. In addition, the supervisor was asked what he or she thought the ramifications of the study would be to supervisors and administrators and how they could use the information gathered by the researcher. These interviews were also audiotaped and are verbatim in the following chapter.

During the five days of classroom observations, the researcher took field notes documenting time usage, lesson content, participation style, instructional technique, and classroom climate differences. In addition to this, on days two through four, the researcher watched particularly for specific interaction behaviors based on concepts from the TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement) interaction model. (Kerman and Martin, 1980) Only the concepts from this model were used. Because of the study design, the five day-to-day units were rearranged by the researcher and three of the coded behaviors were not used at all. The three behaviors that were not included
were: equitable distribution of response opportunities, listening, and touching. For example, on day two, response opportunities including individual helping, latency or wait time, rephrasing, and questioning level were documented. On day three, teacher feedback including affirmation of student work, praise, reasons for praise, and accepting feelings was documented. On day four, personal regard including proximity, courtesy, compliments, and methods of correction was noted. The observer also noted teacher communication styles, both verbal and nonverbal, as well as circulation patterns in the classroom.

Population and Sample

The schools are all comprehensive high schools in the suburbs of Chicago with student populations from 1700 to 3000 students. The teachers have all had previous teaching experience, although one teacher is new to teaching at the high-school level. To provide a range of school contexts for the study, teachers are selected from schools which vary according to student socio-economic status and racial characteristics. While these schools differ in terms of student background characteristics, all the selected schools group students for instruction in English. The schools do, however, differ in the number of ability group levels, ranging from two to four levels.

Most of the students are ninth-graders, except for one class of tenth-graders who are repeating English. There are also some mainstreamed Special
Education students in the low-track classes as well as some language-minority students.

**Teacher Interviews**

Following the five days of observation in the teacher's high- and low-track English classes, the teacher was interviewed by the researcher. The interview was audiotaped. The following questions, the first five of which correspond to the five research questions, were asked of each teacher:

1. Do you believe that you interact differently with different ability groups? If so, how?

2. Do you choose different instructional techniques to teach the different ability groups? If so, how did you decide upon the techniques to use?

3. Do you believe that you use different communication styles, both verbal and nonverbal, in interacting with the different ability groups? If so, with which style are you most comfortable and why?

4. Do you notice that there is a difference in the amount of time spent on actual instruction in the different ability groups? If so, how do you explain this?
5. Do you notice a different climate in the different ability grouped classes? If so, how do you explain this?

6. Which class does your supervisor normally visit for evaluation? If you have a choice, which class would you ask the supervisor to come to? Why?

7. How could your supervisor best help you to prepare for teaching the different ability groups? What support does your school offer you?
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter presents the results of the study and the analysis of the data. A brief profile of the participating teachers and schools is introduced first. Since the study is focusing on teacher behavior, the verbatim teacher interviews will be presented next, followed by the supervisor interviews. Finally, a description of the classroom observations will be discussed and the data from the observations presented. An analysis based on the research questions and interview questions will also be included in the chapter.

Due to the confidentiality promised to the participating teachers and schools, neither will be named. Instead, a demographic description of each of the four schools and an educational profile of the five participating teachers will be included. The participating teachers were assigned a code letter as were their schools and supervisors.

Four suburban comprehensive high schools agreed to participate and had teachers who fit the parameters of the study. Two of the high schools are located in suburban Cook County and two are in DuPage County. The student population ranges from 1700 to 3000. All of the schools group
students for English classes with two to four ability levels in the Freshman English classes.

**School and Teacher Profiles**

School A is a school with student enrollment of 2,000. According to its 1992 Community Report, 78.8% of its students are white, 0% are black, 1.9% are Asian, and 18.8% are Hispanic. 8.8% of the students are classified as low income and 7% are limited-English proficient. As to the type of high school programs, 54.9% of the students were in the College Preparatory Program, 19% in the General Education Program, and 26% in the Vocational Education Program. Teacher A has been teaching for twenty years with eight of those years in this school. This teacher has twenty credit hours beyond the bachelor's degree.

School B is the same school for Teachers B and C. According to its 1992 Community Report, it has a student population of 2,900. Of these students, 38% are white, 1% are black, 59.5% are Hispanic, and 2% are Asian. 29.6% of the students are classified as low income and 11.4% are limited-English proficiency. In this school, 38% of the students are enrolled in the College Preparatory Program, 19% in the General Education Program, and 43% in the Vocational Education Program. Teacher B has taught for two years as a teaching assistant in a university and a year substituting. This is the first year of teaching experience in a high school. This teacher has all coursework
completed for a Masters in English Literature. Teacher C has twelve years of
teaching experience with two of those years in this school. This teacher has
completed a Masters degree.

School D has a student population of 2,300 according to its 1993
Community Report. This school's students are 76% white, 3% black, 5.9%
Hispanic, and 14% Asian. 2% of the students are classified as low income and
1% are limited-English proficient. The 1993 Community Reports do not include
data on program enrollment. Teacher D has sixteen years of teaching
experience with fifteen of those years at this school. This teacher has 45 hours
beyond the Masters degree.

School E has a student population of 1,700 according to its 1993
Community Report. The students at this school are 86% white, 2% black, 4%
Hispanic, and 5% Asian. 5% of these students are classified as low income and
4% are limited-English proficient. There is no data on program enrollment.
Teacher E has one year of teaching experience in another district. This is the
first year this teacher has taught in this school. The teacher is working
towards a Masters degree presently.
Question One:

Do you believe that you interact differently with different ability groups?

If so, how?

All of the teachers answered yes to this question.

Teacher A’s lower-level class includes three mainstreamed Special Education students and three language-minority students. This school has four ability levels in Freshman English. Teacher A responded: “Yes, I think that with the higher level I might use more subtle humor and jokes. With the lower level, I try to talk slower because those kids come in here with learning problems. I tend to because it’s my personality to talk fast and animated and I try to slow down because there are so many messages coming in with them. That’s one of many things I do. For example, with lower Freshman, the counting works for them. It’s a real concrete thing. It takes a quarter but it works. It’s good that I have them the last period because I can hold them over at the end of the day. I wouldn’t do that in any other period. With the higher groups, I tolerate less nonsense. With the lower group, I tend to build a rapport with them faster because the lower group is actually harder to deal with because they have all kinds of problems in Special Ed or Chapter 1. Not that the higher
group doesn’t have problems, but the lower group has more academic and behavior problems, they’re just connected. Last year, I had two Delta classes and 75% of the kids were in Special Ed or special programs like ASD or Chapter 1. (The Academic Skill Development Program is where they don’t qualify for Chapter 1, LD, or BD, but were referred from grade school teachers as students who need extra help.) The lower kids, I will monitor what they’re doing so they get started and have less homework. I think my teaching style is pretty much the same, but everything is slowed down, my voice and what I give them. I allow more nonsense with them because I know that with some of them, they can’t help it. They can’t stay focused and stay in their seat. You also get an occasional kid in the higher class like that, but not as frequently.”

Teacher B was not sure of the number of mainstreamed Special Education students or language-minority students. This school has four ability levels of Freshman English. Teacher B responded: “Yes. The dynamics of the class are different. The number of students is smaller with the Alpha class and is more interactive. The Gamma class number is high twenties so it can’t be as personal and there are issues of discipline because of the numbers. The rhetoric is similar, but more sophisticated with the Alphas, but there is not an appreciable difference. As to content, I’m interested in teaching exactly the same content with different texts.”
Teacher C’s lower-level class is a repeater speech class for students who failed Freshman English. There are four ability levels of Freshman English in this school. The other class observed was a Freshman English class at the highest ability level. There are two or three mainstreamed Special Education students in the lower level class. Teacher C responded: “Definitely, by taking a look at the two classes. The one class needs more guidance and has more behavior problems which you deal with in a different way than you would with the other class. I find myself being more animated in the lower level over the other or feeling the need to be touching each group as much as I can.”

Teacher D’s lower-level class has three or four mainstreamed Special Education students. There may be some language-minority students also who have used up their time in ESL or one transfer student who should have begun in ESL. There are three ability levels of Freshman English in this school. Teacher D responded: “Yes, I do. Let me count the ways. In terms of my style of speaking to them, I try to be very conscious of my language choice to make it appropriate for each level. I also think that my expectations for student response are different. I give a lot of latitude to the 1B students when assignments need to be repeated or a concept has just blown right by them and probably would allow less of that with the honors students. There’s an assumption on my part that the honors students are capable of more abstract concepts and so the things that I choose to discuss with them reflect
that. I'm sure there's many other things that probably go into this, but those are the ones that stand out to me.”

Teacher E's lower-level class has two or three mainstreamed Special Education students. There are only two levels of Freshman English in this school. Teacher E responded: “You can have more mature discussions in the regular class. More of the discussions in the basic class are centered around how to become a better reader, not what you read, and we don't even talk about that in regular. In general, the basic kids are less mature and you have to keep them on task more. We read aloud, like you heard, and you have to keep them more accountable. We had two quizzes every day. The basic kids take more responsibility. Last quarter, I had 945 points for basic and more than one assignment every day and only 800 for regular. A lot of the basic points were five points here, five points there. In regular, there were a lot less grades even though there were a lot of points. Testing is different, we review more in basic and they do less at home. Their frustration level is a lot higher because a lot of them can't read very well. It's really hard if they're absent because even if they want to make up work, sometimes they can't read the assignment. They react differently, they ask a lot more questions in basic. I mean you can't sit down, they're always asking questions. They don't follow directions very well. I'll ask a couple of people when the test is going to be and
they still won't know. In regular, you can write it on the board on Monday and they'll still know on Friday.”

Question Two:

Do you choose different instructional techniques to teach the different ability groups? If so, how did you decide upon the techniques to use?

Two teachers responded yes to this question and two said no. The fifth answered yes and no.

Teacher A: “Actually, I write more on the board with the lower group and they always have a sample of what to do. Actually, I think that’s important to do with any level, depending on what you learning mode is, visual or auditory. It’s important to give them a sample of what to do. With the Deltas, you can’t give too much information at once. It’s one little piece of information or it’s too much and they can’t absorb it all or they get overwhelmed. With the higher group, they can take in more, a three-step process or you’ll have a test over this tomorrow. With the lower group, everything is very short, concrete, and a variety of activities. I could never lecture the majority of the period with Deltas because of the reasons I said earlier. They get overwhelmed too easily. What really dawned on me, I started off with the Delta class and it took me over a quarter. First, I came in and it went way over their heads. I was too formal. I was expecting too much academically.
Then I went to the other extreme and I thought we won’t have homework. One day, this little girl said, ‘We don’t have homework in my other classes. This is too hard for us, you can’t give us homework because we can’t do it.’ It was like a light went off in my mind and I said, ‘Wait a minute. Who told you you were stupid and who told you you were dumb?’ I spent the whole period talking to those classes and said, ‘You’re going to have homework, you are capable of doing it, and you will do it, and we will have a point system.’ Point for getting in their seat on time and having paper and pencil. Point if you got your homework in. Point for working in class. Point for showing respect to the teacher and to others. The sixth point, participation and taking risks. By second semester, they didn’t need it. I would not do this with Alphas. I would graph the points for the Deltas and it was something they could see and would ask about each day. It also really helped when I called parent and for progress reports. I wouldn’t do that with Alphas and generally they don’t need that.”

Teacher B: “I do not use different techniques. I believe that class is a place where students and teachers talk interactively and where students are writing. They are also working in small groups. The three techniques are the same with both sections. Because of the number of students in the Alpha class, they may have more time in small groups or be given more difficult assignments because I am able to better monitor 15 students.”
Teacher C: “I don’t think I use different techniques. I would use the same techniques in both classes and I will vary the techniques as often as I can. What I probably do more with the lower-level classes because they’re older is try to build a relationship with them much faster than I try to with the other class partly because it helps to control the class. This group of kids, if you try to come on real strong, you won’t have much of a chance with them. Trial and error was how I decided. The speech class, this is the third time I taught it. The first two times, I kept a journal. Then I also have the kids’ journals and ask them for feedback as well as asking them to take a look at their own performances. The Alpha class or any class is trial and error. Each class personality is different so you have to change the technique for each class too. My two Alpha classes aren’t at all alike. You have to gear your approach to each one differently.”

Teacher D: “Yes. Let me rephrase that, yes and no. Let’s use today for an example. What I was doing in English 1B was the writing process, the same writing process would be used in English 1H. That is, we move from brainstorming and discovering subject matter to creating a plan or visual map to a first draft. The difference would be in the speed with which that is delivered to them and how much of a visual aid is provided. If I were doing the same thing with 1H, I wouldn’t bother with the handout which had circles already handwritten on it nor would I start with a list of seven blanks. I would
allow them to generate as much as they could independently. So the system is fundamentally the same, the application you will see some variations.”

Teacher E: “We read aloud a lot more in basic because their frustration level is higher and I always have to start out a story or they won’t read it. I kind of have to tell them what the story is going to be about or they won’t understand it. We go over vocabulary every day more than I would in the regular, they can study at home. I decide on which techniques to use based on their needs, I guess. I’ve assigned reading at home, but you saw when I was going to have a quiz on their reading and they all said they didn’t understand the story. So you don’t know if it would be fair because you don’t know if they did read it, they tried to read it and they couldn’t, or they just didn’t read it. When I gave that essay for the quiz, I had to give them topic sentences and give them examples and still some of them didn’t follow directions. It has to be a lot more structured.”

Question Three:

Do you believe that you use different communication styles, both verbal and nonverbal, in interacting with the different ability groups? If so, with which style are you most comfortable and why?

Four teachers answered yes to this question and one teacher could not give a yes or no answer.
Teacher A: “I’m more nurturing with the lower level. The girl today came up to me and has no sense of body space. Today she was taking off my hat and holding my hand just because she loves me and she loves everyone. I have to take her aside after class some day and explain that people have space. I do more touching with them, it’s easier with a Delta class to walk over and touch them on the shoulder or have an expression rather than to say something because if you make a big deal out of it then the whole class falls apart and they’re all into it. With the higher level class, I can stop and say, ‘Eve, turn around and be quiet.’ It’s not like everyone stops what they’re going and looks up. The nurturing is more so with the Deltas. I had wonderful Alpha classes last year. We had rapport and we could do anything, structured, unstructured. The Folk Festival and Victorian Teas with decorating and baking and posters and reports. I don’t feel that same kind of rapport yet this year. Several kids are still power struggling. I’ve tried a couple of things. With Deltas, I can peg that kid’s needs faster because their needs are right up front. They’re more verbal and disinhibited, whereas with the higher level groups they tend to be more pseudosophisticated and they’re smarter with their comments. They’re smarter power strugglers, so I don’t want to get into that power struggle so I have to talk to the kid outside. I don’t normally have to talk to a kid outside in a Delta class. More nonverbals with the Delta because it causes more disruptions, whereas with the Alphas, I’ll be more direct, ‘Stop it
now' or 'Turn around'. It's not that I don't do that with the Deltas, but I try to have less disruption out loud because they'll hook into that. It helps that I taught Special Ed because I learned more about myself. I helped run groups. I learned to try different interventions. The main thing I learned was that it's OK to be wrong and to apologize for that mistake. It's OK to take a risk and try certain things and I learned that in Special Ed, that if this doesn't work then don't keep doing it, try something else. If it fails miserably, then it fails and you go on to the next. I think teachers become too rigid, especially if you've taught for a while and we're not open to new ideas and suggestions. If the class isn't going well, you might as well try something new, you have nothing to lose. I have a better understanding of what these kids are coming from and the journal entries. There's nothing that could shock me because I have seen from North Shore to the inner city the worst and the best from all kinds of abusive homes so that doesn't shock me."

Teacher B: "I think the rhetoric may be a bit more sophisticated with the Alphas. Because we are tracked, The Iliad is more sophisticated than Rumble Fish, but it is more a case of the curriculum I'm given. When teaching the same thing, I would teach exactly the same way. Nonverbals are not that different. I try to walk around the room to keep the students on task."

Teacher C: "I'm not sure that I can give a yes or no. In the Alpha class, you still have some kids you are cuing for behavior, cuing to keep on task, but
it's not as many. So you're doing both verbal and nonverbal with them. With the low-level class, you're probably having to do it more so you're working more with behavior management. In that sense, yes, there is a difference just in quantity rather than quality. In terms of which one I am more comfortable, I would not want four or five Deltas in a day. I really enjoy being with them, but it seems real demanding. At the same time, I don't think I would want four or five Alphas either because they're demanding but in a different way. I like the mix that I have because I can go from one to the other and I think it's a healthy mix."

Teacher D: "Yes. As I mentioned earlier, I'm conscious of my language choice. I try to use tone of voice and pace in different ways with both groups. I'll repeat myself more with the basics. When it comes to definitions, for example, I not only dictate it slowly, but also put it up in visual form on the board. Whereas, with the honors students, if a definition is necessary, I usually just dictate it and with a different pace as well. Nonverbals, I would be more hard-pressed. In terms of classroom management, I find myself working the crowd more with basics. I try to get in closer physical proximity with them and keep them which I don't have to do with the honors students. I guess you could say my nonverbal cues for 'Get under control here' are probably more visible with the basics."
Teacher E: “In basic, I had them pick the vocabulary words out and wanted them to come up with the questions because they have to realize what they don’t understand. It makes my job a lot harder because I don’t know if some of those words are too easy. It seems like there’s more diversity in basic. There are some people that are really struggling, some people that are just lazy. I guess I’m more comfortable with regular, picking my own words. Basic people don’t like to rewrite things and just want to get things done and don’t care how sloppy they are. I feel like I’m drilling it in their heads what they have to do, but then I feel like there are a couple people in there who are like ‘Be quiet alright, let us get to work.’ I repeat more with them. It’s frustrating with them. You assign an assignment and you get 70%, 60%, and it’s hard, do you go back? They were supposed to do it at home. If you go back, you’re enabling them and they can skip the homework. Their frustration level is so high. They’re not the people who are going to go back on their own to catch up. I have to probe a lot more for answers and give them hints all the time. You know, starts with this letter or rhymes with this letter or give them devices to remember how to spell words. The basic goal is a lot different. They had to work in groups because it’s more important that they are able to get along than if they know what a noun is because a lot of them aren’t going to college. They have to be able to read and write and get along by the time they leave. Their behavior is a lot different. A lot of kids are used to getting a lot of
referrals in basic and their attention span is shorter. I feel like I constantly have to call on people like (student’s name), if I’m not on top of him all the time, then he doesn’t pay attention. He’s easily sidetracked.”

Question Four:

Do you notice that there is a difference in the amount of time spent on actual instruction in the different ability groups? If so, how do you explain this?

Three teachers answered yes to this question. One teacher answered yes and no. One teacher answered no.

Teacher A: “I will give a lot less play time to Alphas than to the Deltas. Like today, I knew it was Friday and there were a lot of interruptions like the lawn mower outside and these kids are frequently truant and other interruptions like the Deans’ Office and Attendance Office, etc.”

Teacher B: “I try very hard to give the same amount of instruction time. I may actually give more instruction time to the lower level. It is perceived that they are less self-motivated so I work harder to get them to learn. I wouldn’t say there’s an appreciable difference. Each class does ten minutes on journals which I use as a segueway into the topic of the day. I give five minutes at the end of the day if they are good. I try to be as consistent as possible.”
Teacher C: “In the lower-level classes, you find yourself working with behavior more than you do in the upper-level classes because most of the kids in the upper-level class are somewhat self-motivated. I'm not saying that they aren’t in the lower-level class, but there are more kids in the lower-level class who have already turned off. So you end up spending more time with their behavior. They’re not nearly as self-motivated or interested. It isn’t necessarily their lack of skills as much as their lack of interest.”

Teacher D: “Yes and no. It largely depends upon the material that we’re working on. It also is determined partly by the students themselves and the chemistry. Typically, I find that I spend more time with classroom management in 1B, much more so than I do in 1H. Right now, I would say that about the same amount of time is given to the 1B as the 1H students for homework done in class, but that will change over time. When we get started reading a book-length piece in 1B, I'll be allotting a greater portion of the classroom period for doing that homework. Right now I don’t because these assignments are so short that they virtually use little if no time to get through them so I leave them mostly to their own devices for that. Now with the honors, it again depends on the material. As a rule of thumb, I probably try to allot 15-20 minutes of time in class, but I’m not at all reluctant to waive that with the honors students because I feel they’re more capable of handling that outside
the classroom. If I feel that time is better spent with some sort of activity, I’ll ignore the trying to preserve 10-15 minutes for the homework.”

Teacher E: “They’re constantly doing things in basic. In my regular classes, I can talk more. Even if it’s not going to be on the test, they’re so interested, like on the Trojan War and the background and they want to know. In basic, I would have to have a quiz right after I said all of this information or they wouldn’t listen. As far as homework goes, I give a lot more homework in regular. I guess, my instruction or me talking would be more in the basic. Them doing things, they get a lot more done in regular. When I told them to do the journal entries, they got right to work. So I think there’s a lot of wasted time in basic because a lot of them are clueless of what to do or how to do it or where to start even thought it’s right there. A lot of time the directions will be right there and they’ll still ask. They don’t do assignments that they don’t understand. They’d rather not do them than try. Basic kids make fun of each other more and are more distracted. I think that they’re not confident of themselves so they put other people down like when they’re reading up here. I’ll step in and say ‘That isn’t appropriate’ and try to make a comfortable environment where people aren’t afraid to make mistakes. That’s like when I had them read out loud. I would like them to read it before they get up there so it’s more comfortable and they won’t see any word they haven’t seen before.”
Question Five:

Do you notice a different climate in the different ability grouped classes? If so, how do you explain this?

All five teachers answered yes to this question.

Teacher A: "Probably the Alphas tend to be more cliquish although we have to say that it's only the first month of school and they came from different feeder schools. Back to the Deltas, they tend to be more open and disinhibited and they work together more readily except in that one situation last week and that goes back to grade school. She said he was prejudiced against Hispanics and I sat them on the floor here at my desk and then they were OK with it."

Teacher B: "Absolutely. That has a lot to do with tracking. Alphas know they are good students. They know they are in the best classes and perhaps have the best instruction. They are better behaved and more focused. With the Gammas, I would feel resentment. I would think 'You're tracking me so I'll act that way.' As soon as you categorize someone, you conform to the expectations of that community. I don't agree with tracking. That's a difference in social climate. I start class with a statement to the Gammas that I teach the same as the Alpha class to empower them to go on to college. There are also repercussions among the staff members. I got
Alphas as a first-year teacher. It can create resentment among the staff over teaching assignments.”

Teacher C: “I do notice a difference, but it depends on the class. I’ve had Alpha classes where they’re so competitive with each other that it’s really not fun to teach. And yet I’ve had other Alpha classes where the competitiveness is there, but it’s not so apparent and so they’re much more interested. On the other hand, in many ways, the social situation is not any different because within the Alpha class there are the kids who are very popular and the kids who are not very popular even though they’re all bright. You see the same thing in the Delta classes. There are some kids who are not very bright, but who somehow develop a large following and are popular and others who are very isolated. You see kids who work very, very hard and kids who don’t work hard. In some ways, I don’t think that their ability level is necessarily reflective of how they as a group socialize. I would question that if they were all lumped together. I don’t feel like I interact differently and that may be contradicting what I said in the first question. There may be times where I am entertaining more than I do with the Alphas, but not a lot, not enough. Some of the same needs are with the Alphas and the Deltas and those are human needs more than academic needs.”

Teacher D: “Yes, I do see distinct differences in chemistry in both kinds of relationships between students and teacher and students and students. I
find that, for a while at least, I have to be formal in my relationship, more
distant with my relationship with 1B students for the purpose of classroom
management. I think I’m more direct and assertive with them. I can be less so
with the honors students. It seems as though the behavioral responses I get
from them differ in terms of how they present themselves and how they
behave. In most cases, with honors students, if a student gets chatty, usually
it’s just a little verbal caution from me to slow it down would be all that’s
necessary from me to the honor student. With the basics, that’s not the case.
I find that as the year opens up and the 1B students begin to feel more
comfortable and feel like flexing their muscles, that a verbal suggestion needs
to be reenforced by more. Sometimes reenforced by detentions and that
occurs with much greater frequency in basic students. In terms of interaction
between the two of them, I do notice qualitative differences. I mean in many
respects they are similar, but I do notice that my basic students as a rule
show more tendencies to be less supportive of one another, to be more
challenging of one another. Now that same stuff goes on in the other class-
room, but I don’t think as much. I think you’ll find more students making
friendlier bonds. There’s less of the put-down in the honors class where I see
that showing up a lot in the basics class and it’s pretty consistent from year
to year, I’ve had basics for many years, that at some point in the year, I need
to stop that in the classroom. On the other hand, fourteen-year-olds can be
just that. I find that a pair of boys in the honors class can be just as physical with one another and horse around just as a couple of the 1B boys.”

Teacher E: “There’s definitely a different social climate. Usually if you’re in a basic class, you have all your classes with the same people. You’re in all basic classes. I think a lot less is expected of them. I think you have a lot of people who don’t belong in that class, who are just lazy. In the regular class, they’re a lot more involved in the school. In the class you came into, no one’s in sports or in anything. I think they expect you to repeat things over and over. In my 8th hour, I won’t let them leave unless they show me they’ve got something done. When they have to write their spelling words ten times or they can’t leave. I would never do that with my regular class. They would just do it. You constantly have to check to see if they’re working on homework. Call a lot more parents. These aren’t usually the concerned parents. At parent-teacher conferences, I had three from basic and 35 from regular. I think they have a lot more family problems. They come to me about it, if I want to hear it or not. They’re more leechy, they all need attention. They tell me their problems and I have to see a lot more counselors. In my 8th hour, I have 23 or 24 students and in 7th hour, it’s only 10 students. I have 13 sheets in 8th hour and so many reports. Then it’s so hard to teach because most people don’t do their homework. Then I feel that I’m giving less homework because people keep falling behind. That’s not really fair to the people that do
their homework. They always make comments about I'm the person that gives
the most homework and I don't feel that I give a lot of homework, but I've
never taught basic before. That's another difference, they always question
why we're doing everything. If they don't think there's a purpose, then they
don't want to do it. They complain.”

Question Six:

Which class does your supervisor normally visit for evaluation? If you
had a choice, which class would you ask the supervisor to come to?

Teacher A: “Let’s see, (name of former supervisor) visited Alphas.
(Name of present supervisor) visited Alphas. I think she was just interested in
what was the best period, but I might have been asked. Last year, because it
was the first year I taught Deltas, I would have preferred Alphas, but it was
best on her schedule anyway. This year, if she asked me, I wouldn’t care. The
Deltas would be OK because I feel more comfortable with them in terms of the
curriculum too, not just in terms of how I handle the kids. It really wouldn’t
make a difference. It’s also because she’s already seen the Alphas and that
was a really good evaluation. I suppose if it was my first time here, I would
probably say to come into the Alphas, probably choose the best class as the
show class.”
Teacher B: “I would want him to visit Gamma classes because he'll get a truer read of what goes on. There is no point to observing an Alpha class except to improve pedagogy. This was his first observation and he came to an Alpha class.”

Teacher C: “They chose one of everything last year. I was evaluated five times last year and they saw one of each class. I would like them to come to each class. It doesn't matter the level. The level has nothing to do with the quality of teaching. The individual class may, just because of their personality, but in terms of the level, it has nothing to do with that one way or another.”

Teacher D: “Probably my honors classes, that would be my choice. It really depends upon circumstances. I've had observations in all of my classes, basics, honors, and regular track. Why? The students seem to perform much better in that class at a higher level. They seem to catch on with the chemistry of someone new in there watching things and put their best foot forward in terms of ability. I think that as an individual teacher and employee, trying to put on the best face I can for evaluation and having my students perform at higher levels probably puts on a better face for me.”

Teacher E: “My regular classes because 7th hour, there aren't that many people and 8th hour there are too many people and they're too loud. I'm a first-year teacher and that's probably why I don't want her to go in there. I would not hesitate for her to come into my 7th hour, but I feel like
there isn’t that much to say because there’s only 10 people. (Name of Assistant Principal) doesn’t let me choose, but (name of department chair) does. I’ve only had one observation and she came into regular class. Next time, she’ll come into 7th hour.”

Question Seven:

How could your supervisor best help you to prepare for teaching the different ability groups? What support does your school offer you?

Teacher A: “It would be nice if your department chair did not call you the night before school starts and tell you that you’re teaching a Senior Contemporary Lit class that you’ve never taught before. One thing is to, very early on, I mean that very first day workshop, set aside a time to work with another teacher who teaches the same class. She is helpful, she said now this is what I’ve found. She told me about the typical behavior of the Deltas, typically what to expect in terms of assignments, how long they should be, how varied they should be, how much homework to give and then, material, that was very helpful. When you come in to observe, I would like to hear suggestions about how to do it better, not what I did each minute, or something that I’m not seeing. A few years ago, I was teaching Romeo and Juliet and I was overstocked on worksheets and overteaching. I figured, the more worksheets you have, the less you know what you’re doing. Those kids had so many
handouts and did so much work, that I was trying to overteach and overwhelm them. That was real helpful to me when I looked back and thought, 'You’re right, I’m trying to put too much into a period, like the more information I get in the more impressive it is to you.' I would like hands-on about academic feedback about how I did, the style, the discipline, pointers like that would be real helpful. But actually, I found the most helpful of all is having your own peers come in, someone you really trust. I did that and it was great. I got constructive feedback and criticism. One other thing, it has happened here before, it's a real set-up for a teacher when there's been an assembly second period and you're being observed third period. Now I understand that changes can't be made sometimes if things happen. If people took that into consideration when they got that evaluation, that's one thing, but in reality, I don't think they do. It's really hard to be objective and it's a subjective evaluation for the most part. So, I know one time, I was all prepared and I had worked on this long unit and it was going to be a special activity and I thought it would be real neat. Something came up and it was inconvenient and could she come in fourth period instead of third or could it be tomorrow? I think that evaluations should be made where people just walk down the hall and come in at any point for ten or fifteen minutes. If you're going to do that, you have to do it many, many times. I had a principal who would come in formally three times, but informally many times. I'm kind of intimidated by that, but it's real helpful.
Come on, you’re told a month in advance that the department chair is coming in to observe. You’re going to have your best deal that day. So anybody can be really good for one or two days.”

Teacher B: “The school offers me none. They’re talking about getting rid of the tracking system because of the state. I think the English curriculum is a mess. It should be that whatever level you’re in, you should still read three novels, write four papers, and cover the same thematic issues. I’d like to work on that to bring the curriculum in line. It’s been pretty up in the air since I’ve been here. The one thing that saved me is the departmental final and I’m organizing around that. I’m spending three days on narration, but there’s only one question on the final on it.”

Teacher C: “When I originally started, the division chair gave me lots of information, but the biggest thing that she did for me was give me the freedom to make mistakes because I don’t think anyone can prepare you for what a Delta is like or what an Alpha is. I came from a junior high where we didn’t have levels. So, in many ways, you’re not really prepared. I already had the tactics. It was just a matter of finding which ones to use. It took me almost a year to figure out what all of their needs are and what constitutes a certain level. My second year’s class went much better because I had an idea beforehand of what they needed and what things worked. They gave me adequate support. I’m not sure they could have trained me. I had an extensive back-
ground, but even so, my first year was very difficult. It was terrible. I think that anybody's first year is, to learn a new system, to learn the kids, to feel at ease. It takes a while."

Teacher D: "First, it occurs in the commitment to keeping lower class size in basics to begin with. Secondly, it occurs in a departmental commitment to make certain that basics does not become a dumping ground for behavioral problems. Support comes out by publicizing inservice that's available for reading/ teaching strategies. Switching to the honors briefly, I think that support is out there for broadening the educational experiences in the way of field trips and things of that nature."

Teacher E: "Well, I've never taught basic before and I guess I came in expecting a lot more. The things you expect to take fifteen minutes, take five because they don't care what they hand in. Like, you know, if they have to write a page, it will take two minutes with three words on every line. And then what do you do? Refer you to someone who has taught basic before. I went to talk to (teacher's name) and some of the ideas I had, she said, the basics won't be able to do. I'm glad she told me that before. These aren't the classes you learn about in your college classes. I guess the (name of special program) program is helping even though it is a pain because more people are doing their homework because they have those sheets and there's consequenc-es. Of course, the deans help and they can't skip the class. Like (student's
name) had a problem and he shows up every day now. I chose collegial coaching that the school is offering to teachers and I picked up cooperative learning in the basic class. That’s the first time when you came in that they worked in groups. You’re very hesitant to do things like that because their behavior is so much worse. They just get sidetracked. Like 8th hour, I’m very scared to do this. It was funny because in 8th hour there were three in a group and there was a lot more fighting about who did more work because they don’t want to do anything extra. But once they get up here, they fight on who gets to read the story and who gets to call on people, that’s the highlight, so they actually like to do this. At first, I thought it was going to be a disaster because they weren’t getting that much work done working in groups, but their presentations were very good. I think I would have them in pairs next time, but I would use cooperative learning again. The reason it’s hard to do this is because some of those kids just don’t care and if they’re flunking and they have no chance of passing and he’s your partner, that’s not fair because one person does all the work. There’s pros and cons. In my 8th hour, I usually have about five people stay after a week to finish their assignments. One girl couldn’t get along with her partner, so I gave her the whole thing. She had to stay after and do the whole thing. I’m glad my 8th hour is 8th hour because I can hold them.”
Supervisor Interviews

Question One:

Do you believe that teachers interact differently with different ability groups? If so, how?

All three supervisors answered yes to this question.

Supervisor of Teacher B and C: “Yes, teachers are stricter with low ability groups to keep the kids on task. They are very easily distracted and have to enforce the rules more stringently to keep them focused. With class behavior, there is a more rigid structure because the lower level students are unable to provide structure for themselves so the teacher must provide it. They must give the basic foundations before they can branch off and do fun things. They must have the foundations first.”

Supervisor of Teacher D: “I guess that I think that teachers interact differently with individual students so a person... I guess I feel it’s a loaded question of are there certain expectations that we have of certain groups so we come in like gangbusters with a basic class. I think it’s more that I’ve observed of what the traffic will allow. I’ve seen very informal, jolly, creative basic classes and I’ve seen the same kind of atmosphere in honors classes. I’ve seen very uptight honors classes that are kind of ‘We’ve got to get all this work done’ so there really isn’t as much interaction as you would want to see
and I’ve seen that in basics classes. I feel that, my experience is limited to (name of school) but 25 years here, we keep doing a little better job of sorting out students who are appropriate to basic level class and we want the hard-working little guy who needs that extra attention maybe so he’s in a smaller class, but not automatically or at all, we hope, a discipline problem. If we really hit it right and we have the right kind of student in there, I don’t think that a teacher...I’m thinking back to my observations of basic classes... and I can’t think of a time that a teacher has treated students in a certain way because they were basics other than perhaps slowing down, repeating something, but even in that case, I find the students tend to be more attentive if you aren’t repeating, if you’re moving at a faster pace. The short answer is no. It’s more the personality of the class. Some classes can run in a loose manner. It’s more dependent on the students than on the ability level.”

Supervisor of Teacher E: “I would think the answer to that usually is yes. I think I notice that when they’re working with students of lower ability, they’re more concerned with structure and routine. And because they need to call kids to attention more frequently and, uh, they probably give them smaller groups to work in and rather than working with three or four in a group, they tend to work in groups of two if they do group work. I see some good things when they work with low-track kids, in that very often they will have more activities within the time period and not spend as much time so there’s a bigger variety
within the day. I think it's because of the sustained interest of the students and they build that into their lesson plans. So, conversely, I'm saying that when they teach a class of average or above-average students, they probably have larger groups, have fewer activities, and probably allow a greater latitude for student behavior, actually, because they can call the class to attention more easily and it doesn't take as much time to get the students back on task.”

Question Two:

Do teachers choose different instructional techniques to teach the different ability groups? If so, how did they decide upon the technique to use?

All three supervisors answered yes to this question.

Supervisor of Teachers B and C: “Yes. In upper-level classes, there are more higher-level thinking skills, more mixture of very traditional lecture/discussion with nontraditional techniques such as cooperative learning. The lower level is more straight instruction. We are trying to get more ‘hands-on’ to supplement. In the lower-level classes, there has to be a better structured class with more fundamental objectives to make it clear to the students. The teachers are more redundant to take into account the learning styles and level of skills.”
Supervisor of Teacher D: “I think that teachers are gradually choosing different instructional techniques at every level now and I would say that this is something that we have really been working on and talking about, moving from teacher-oriented classroom to the student-oriented. I would say that more of the cooperative learning and more of the student-oriented things have happened in the basics level. Then because the basics-level teacher also taught honors, it came in the back door into the other courses. I would say that teachers with the basics kids were more determined to keep struggling to find a different way to keep and hold the student’s attention. If I can stereotype a little bit, the basics kids are more likely to just blurt out, ‘Why, this is stupid. I don’t understand.’ Regular kids are a little more timid about that and honors kids are very used to taking notes and listening to a lecture. I would say in the last ten years, I have a good feeling about using a lot of different methods in every different level, but it’s been something that’s been gradual starting from the basics up.”

Supervisor of Teacher E: “I probably touched on that a little bit when I said the groups are smaller. I think they tend to give more handouts to the slower kids and expect the other kids to take notes more frequently so I think they adjust in that way. I see all of my teachers using a lot of learning strategies so that they have a lot of organizers with both low and high-track
classes, so I don’t know that there’s a difference, but I do know that the teachers are using many more organizers than they did years ago.”

Question Three:

Do you believe that teachers use different communication styles, both verbal and nonverbal, in interacting with the different ability groups?

All three supervisors answered yes to this question.

Supervisor of Teachers B and C: “Yes, they do. In terms of verbal, it is most apparent. There is a certain amount of redundancy and restating. With written, it is much more explicit, lead-by-the-nose instruction to provide a working framework to guide the results. Nonverbal communication, the teachers are more animated in the lower-level classes. Part here deals with assertive discipline and Madeline Hunter to change the feeling tone and raise the level of concern. They also use position to temper any acting up.”

Supervisor of Teacher D: “Well, verbal communication, I don’t know whether you’re talking about tone of voice and vocabulary, but I do think that a teacher would not stop to explain a lot of words with an honors kid. Although we find out that that isn’t the way we should do it, use a higher level of vocabulary and again I’m thinking of the extremes of basics and honors. The attitudinal things or maybe body language, rude remarks, that kind of things, I haven’t seen that in a classroom. It may go on. It’s maybe different
when I'm there. I really think that people are even-handed enough and I'd like
to think that they didn't. Individual students can get your pulse bobbing and
basic classes might have more of the students who have attention deficits or
Special Ed kids who are mainstreamed. You're dealing with a lot of things and
different kids of problems and you might tend to be louder or more forceful or
more direct or... but it's more responding to the individual actions than saying,
'You're a basics kids, this is the way I'm going to talk to you.'"

Supervisor of Teacher E: "I have to think about that a minute. Because
I think the teachers are getting very conscious of teaching to different modalities, I see them in most classes, no matter what the track is, teaching to
various modalities. They're teaching through the use of visuals, having students
repeat their directions so there's an oral component. They have the written
word in front of them with their organizers. I don't know that I notice a great
deal of difference in that between the two levels. Say that question again to
me please. I don't think so. I think they move in to the student who's misbehav-
ing and I think they do that in both kinds of classes except that they more do
it more frequently in the others. I've seen students who are misbehaving or
tend to be on the verge of misbehaving stop by virtue of a teacher look or a
teacher hand on the desk or hand on the shoulder. I've seen that in all classes.
I think because there's a greater challenge of behavior sometimes in the lower-
ability classes because there are more kids who could act out, they may use
these techniques more frequently, but I don’t see that they are Jekylls and Hydes, that they are one kind of teachers in one class and another kind of teacher in another. They just may use the skill more frequently. I guess I’m trying to think of what I do too.”

Question Four:

Do you notice that there is a difference in the amount of time spent on actual instruction in the different ability groups? If so, how do you explain this?

Two supervisors answered no to this question and one answered yes.

Supervisor of Teachers B and C: “No, I don’t. The type of instruction changes, but the amount doesn’t. We need to define instruction. It is straight-out explaining in higher-level lectures. If instruction is defined as input and practice, there is not much difference.”

Supervisor of Teacher D: “I don’t think so. I think that giving time to do homework can be actually instruction. Because it’s what Matty called guided practice because the teacher is walking around. Taking it from the other end of the honors, sometimes the expectation is ‘Here’s the material, read it. This will be included on the test, but we won’t have a chance to talk about it.’ I think that at the other end of the spectrum, honors students get a bad break on some of those things in terms of what is expected. Maybe those kids are
more reluctant to say 'I don't understand it. This doesn't make sense.' So I would say the instruction time is about the same. Do you have one about homework? I know that homework is very different. I think that I've talked to a lot of basics teachers who have really grappled with that. If they won't do it at home and it's not only that they can't, but they say that they won't and have never been expected to and the homework expectations are vastly different. This is what concerns me about detracking because you can expect a lot more from a student who has a twelfth-grade reading ability for him to get it accomplished at home and if he's in the same class with the kid who has a fifth-grade reading ability, I just wonder where this is all going. How can we deal with it and still accomplish as much as we do? My basics teachers, when we first started talking about detracking, had a sense that their students are getting special, almost preferential treatment and they thought it would be too bad to throw them into the mainstream with a sink-or-swim. They weren't convinced that the research that says that they come up would be true. I guess they were overprotective and saw them as little lost souls trying to read The Odyssey."

Supervisor of Teacher E: "Very often in a class of low-track kids, because absence is a problem in those classes, the lesson is more self-contained within the time period so that there's not as much dependence on outside work. I think there's less homework assigned in those classes because
the teacher doesn’t expect that the kid is going to go home and read the material. So a lot of that material is read orally in class and discussed in class and the lesson becomes a unit of the class period. With less responsibility for the student in carrying over the preparation to the next day, there’s more time, I think, given in guided practice in those classes because, I think, for one, because the teacher wants to make sure that the youngster knows how to do that kind of grammatical construction, perhaps, but also because they don’t trust that the youngster is going to do it outside of class or remember to bring it if they come the next day. So I see the lessons more self-contained within the period. Whereas in another class of higher-ability students, the expectation is that the youngster will work and prepare overnight for the next day’s instruction and the teacher expects the sequence to have fewer gaps because the youngsters are in class more.”

Question Five:

Do you notice a different climate in the different ability grouped classes?

If so, how do you explain this?

Two supervisors answered yes to this question and one answered no.

Supervisor of Teachers B and C: “Yes, the kids in the upper level know that they are academically stronger and more preppy. The lower-level students are aware that they are in the lower level and their self-esteem is not
as well developed. The two groups stay apart. It has to do with what they feel they have in common. The upper-level kids have goals, the lower-level kids often do not.”

Supervisor of Teacher D: “The social climate is different and I don’t know what all the contributing factors are, but, just based on my observation and I hope it doesn’t sound stereotyping, but there’s more roughhousing or more kind of kidding in a socially unacceptable way in a basics class. I walk into the honors class a minute later and everybody is talking away ninety miles an hour, but it’s mostly ‘Did you get this done?’ and ‘We have this test’ and ‘Did you get this done?’ It’s a different climate and a different feeling. As to the instructional climate, I think I’d have to go back to my other idea about trying to use a variety of methods at each of the different levels. At least, that’s our goal.”

Supervisor of Teacher E: “For the most part, no, and sometimes the rapport between the teacher and the students who have less ability is a very warm, forgiving atmosphere, at least for the people on my staff. They are very concerned about the whole child and so there’s a lot of humor that they use. Whereas the other classes, which are more content-structured, may be more businesslike and less family-centered if you understand what I mean by that term. Some of the low-track classes become a really closely-bonded unit and I think we see that when substitutes come and the kids don’t give the
same respect to the substitutes that they've given to the classroom teacher because they have built enough of a rapport or a dependency on the unit that they don't violate that rapport, but it doesn't seem to carry over to the sub who's coming in. I've also seen when I've gone in to evaluate some classes and I've been forewarned about a student in the class that acts out, that when I'm there, it's not my presence that makes that youngster not act out, but the youngster feels a responsibility to their teacher and they will be better than they've ever been because they can control their behavior when they want to and I think they understand that their teacher is in a position of some stress and they react positively to that challenge. Have you seen that too? But sometimes I think it is truly that they think that they're helping the teacher and they have an unwritten pledge, perhaps, that they will support one another. It does not carry over to the sub, though."

*Question Six:*

Which class do you as the supervisor normally visit for evaluation? If the teacher has a choice, which class would he or she ask you to come to?

*Supervisor of Teachers B and C:* "I try to hit two different levels—one at the higher and one at the lower end. It may be two different classes so they may not be comparable. There is a serious time constraint because of the number of teachers that I evaluate."
Supervisor of Teacher D: "I ask them to ask me in. I don’t visit a particular class unless we’ve been talking about it and then I’ll ask her to ask me in. Evaluation I see is what can I notice that are your strengths that maybe you don’t realize and what are some things that maybe you don’t realize that you’re doing that seem to take away from your strengths. So I see it more as give me your best shot and let’s go from there. If it’s a new teacher and I have to write a formal evaluation, I might say, ‘Let me look at one of these classes the first semester.’”

Supervisor of Teacher E: “My teachers always have a choice and for my inexperienced teachers, they usually ask me to visit an ordinary class, an average class to begin with. Then I request to see a class of below-average students before the year is over, but we don’t usually start there although I always encourage them to invite me into a class where there are some challenges so that together we could add a trick to their bag in order to handle some of those challenges or so I could help them put that challenge into perspective that they may not be the only one being challenged in such a way. My experience in other classes might help them to find some way to meet this challenge. Teachers who are tenured also have the privilege of inviting me to any class that they want. I don’t request to go into a particular class. For the most part, they invite me to visit classes of kids of average ability. What I’m seeing in almost all the classes that I visit is that there’s a great deal of
group work being done, no matter which level I'm going into, but the groups vary in size. We have some interesting programs, for instance the Track II program in eleventh grade, where we're using film to teach the classics to students whose reading ability is lower. Teachers of those classes have usually asked me in because they're kind of excited with the program. That's a basic class, we have changed the terms now. Now the terms would be basic for the low track, core for the average, and honors.”

**Question Seven:**

How could you as the supervisor best help the teacher to prepare for teaching the different ability groups? What support does the school offer the teacher?

Supervisor of Teachers B and C: “There are several things. I have been urging them to network with each other. The experienced senior members of the staff can offer needed input that can help them. One staff member gave a new staffer a most important piece of advice, ‘Don’t try to be the student’s friend because they’ll take advantage of you.’ They can also offer advice about things that make management easier and a variety of techniques. Support is very important. Senior members have a wealth of materials that they have accumulated and are quick to share. I am quick to approve requests to attend conferences and workshops, but I am disturbed this year
Supervisor of Teacher D: "We've tried over the years to do different things, especially with the basics teachers or Chapter 1 teachers as we called them at one point, but it always involves meetings and people go berserk about meetings. They're tired so that wasn't very successful. I think if we could set up some way like a little support group with people from different disciplines with a common resource period, then maybe once a month it wouldn't be so bad. What I can do as an immediate supervisor, my role is an encouraging word, keep the faith. People feel comfortable coming to me saying, 'This doesn't seem to be working. Have you ever had a similar situation?' As to their own training and particular background, I ask them each year what they would prefer to teach the next year and I try to keep that in mind. Sometimes, they'll say, 'I've been teaching basics for five years, I need a change.' Other times, they want to keep going with it. There has to be a certain freshness. It's the empowerment thing of 'I choose to do this and I'm going to do a good job and I know how to do a good job.'"

Supervisor of Teacher E: "Well, how do I prepare them? I think by having a good, strong course of study that they have developed over the years. I think that that's been a real help. In my experience, we have had basic classes where content was a minor issue and we just sort of had holding
pens. That really has not been true over the last seven or eight years. We have upgraded the curriculum in all of our basic classes so that, for the most part, they cover the very same objectives, although perhaps not as exclusively as the other students do. As to different strategies, all of our freshmen do Romeo and Juliet, whether they are in a core class or a basic class or an honors class. The book is different, the strategies are different. What we feel are the issues raised in the play are those that freshmen can get involved with. The same is true at the sophomore and junior level. When I think of some of the courses that we had when I first started to teach at these different levels, I sort of blush for the number of years that we really felt we could teach without having a strong curriculum for these kids. That's no longer true. Also the fact that there's a CRT and the youngsters are held accountable for that material makes it more important for the teacher to keep the kids on task and they have a goal to reach too. What I'm going to say now may sound contradictory, but I know that the (name of program) program and all the other programs that make the kids carry dragsheets around are thought of as a support group, but very often the teachers don't see that. They're very time-consuming for the teacher at the end of each period. I don't know that the teacher gives the correct feedback because in one class, they might have two-thirds of the students with dragsheets. I think that they really don't have the time to really give significant, individualized programs, and I don't mean to
downgrade the program. I think the support group that the program is developing is what the youngsters need, but I don't know if the reporting-out process is the most ideal. The Internal University so far as encouraging cooperative learning in the past few years has certainly been a step in the right direction. All that we've done to develop our goals and objectives has been well done. I think that they also know that there's a professional on the staff who can deal with kids' psychological problems or personal problems. They know how to access this. I think that our teachers have done something with interventions of some kind. A lot of our teachers call home more frequently than they've ever done before and the school has supported that by putting more lines in and that sounds like a minor thing, but it's an important thing in a department this size that we have more telephone lines accessible to us. Hopefully, the new homework phone line is going to help too. Maybe then we can have more homework at the basic level."

Question Eight:

What do you think the ramifications of this study will be to administrators and supervisors and how could you use the information that I am gathering?

Supervisor of Teachers B and C: "This will be a collection of tried and proven wisdom and may not agree with the research in professional journals.
Some research has not been done as scientifically as possible. I went to a conference on tracking by Jeannie Oakes. She immediately backtracked on what she had written and said that tracking may work in some schools. Here at (name of school), we with a very large number of students whose first language is not English, so it is not as easy to accomplish the skills. By tracking, we can get the material more advantageous to the language level. Our philosophy is to keep tracking flexible and to listen to teacher recommendation for tracking changes. This study can give guidelines to new teachers to be more successful in different levels of tried teacher behaviors. Our teachers take more risks because there are so many at-risk students. They need to reach the students by more innovative techniques than at schools like Lyons Township and Hinsdale Central. Our scores are low compared to other schools' scores, but if we compare our student scores to their own eighth-grade scores, ours grow more than students in other schools.”

Supervisor of Teacher D: “In all honesty, I do think that detracking is the wave of the future and we’re going to have to find a way to deal with it because it’s going to be upon us. And I think, for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is almost a legal thing, ‘My kid ought to have the same chance as anybody else’. People just do not see it as the same chance. In many schools, the research that I’ve read indicates that there is a real racial barrier or connection to this. I was just talking to a guy who teaches at (name of
school) last night and he said that the focus of the superintendent is that this is a college-prep high school and we’re not going to have any basics classes. Then he talked about the tendency for this to be racially divisive. I think that the things that you find, the opinions that people express, could be helpful to help us see the big picture maybe with this apparent next thing that we have to deal with which is detracking. And whether or not our district has been working with this and talking about this, we spend department meetings talking about it. I was really pleased with my people who teach basics and how defensive they were of it being a good thing and not being demoralizing and kind of the old bootstrap approach. We have a fourth year of English here called Senior English and kids can choose who have come up through the basics program, it’s not a basics class, but they can choose to go on with the fourth year of English. More than half of the kids who are in the basics track choose to go on to that course. I think we’ve got 75 Juniors in 3B and the senior English course, there are 44 students. I think that speaks well of our basics program and the way of kids not feeling at all like second-class citizens, but sort of in-between. They don’t see it as a bad thing. If there’s somewhere that we can use this information to help us avoid future shock.”

Supervisor of Teacher E: “Well, it depends upon what the teachers are saying to you, I guess. I think it depends on what kind of emotions you’re getting from them about how they feel about teaching these kinds of students
and what kinds of frustrations they're experiencing. On the basis of what kind of frustrations they're experiencing, we can reevaluate the support system. What it is we do to make it, not easier to complete their job, but more effective in their job. Teaching isn't easy at any level. I think when you teach basic youngsters, you don't have the challenge of knowing as extensive a curriculum as when you teach honors students. On the other hand, you have the challenge of recalcitrant or reluctant learners and you have to develop some strategies in order to make sure that those kids are not imposed upon by one or two students who have different values than they do because in a class of twenty basic kids, you probably have ten who are eager to learn, five who are reticent to learn, and another five who might be reluctant to learn and impeding the process of those other fifteen youngsters. I'm not so sure my percentages are correct, but it's what to do with those youngsters who impede what's going on in the classroom that's the challenge to the teacher because no teacher wants to send youngsters to the deans with great frequency. In fact, most of them probably feel that it's a sign of weakness to use the Deans' Office too frequently. This indicates that they can't handle their own classes and they may be looked upon as being not as efficient as other teachers who don't use the Deans' Office. Then there are those who hide their problems forever and, with a little bit of intervention, could turn things around in that class. It's hard to give new teachers a sense of how many dean's
referrals is an indication of frustration or an indication of just assistance. I think everybody has a different feel for that. Because I was a dean at one time, I know how I felt when I would look at a referral from a teacher who sent kids out every day. I also know that when I got a referral from someone who used the Deans' Office on rare occasions, I felt differently about those referrals, rightly or wrongly. I'm not saying I was right when I did that, but if a teacher sends out youngsters in great numbers, you rather wonder about that teacher's flashpoint as opposed to the teacher who tries all of his tricks first and then maybe sends out a youngster for an unusual break in behavior or because, like Chinese torture, it's just the last one in a long string. I might say that working in the Deans' Office made me a much better teacher. An aside, I really feel that positions in the building should be rotated, in and out of the Deans' Office, in and out of the department chair's position. I think that after x number of years, whatever that is, you lose some effectiveness because the job's no longer new and challenging. There are other ideas out there from which the department could benefit. Certainly in the Deans' Office, when you come back from working in the Deans' Office, you know the school from another side. There are also some teachers who just have a knack of working with students of low ability. They just know how to get the kids in their back pocket. They can cozy those youngsters throughout the year, protecting them and challenging them at the same time. I firmly believe that there are some
teachers without the personality to work with students of low ability. As a supervisor, I've always been very careful not to take my newest rookies and dump on them the toughest classes. That's been a goal of mine and I'm really proud of what I've done in that respect. On the other hand, I don't believe that teachers should be given tenure unless they've had the chance to show their mettle with challenging students because they are part of our whole responsibility and they demand the best of us.”

Classroom Observations

Teacher A:

An Alpha (high-track) Freshman English class and a Delta (low-track) Freshman English class were observed on the following dates: September 20, 22, 23, 28 and October 1 of 1993. The Alpha class had 31 students. They were working on a short story unit which included reading, answering study questions, and discussing “The Monkey’s Paw”, “The Interlopers”, “The Sea Devil”, and “Lambs to the Slaughter”. They studied each story’s plot structure, setting, and single emotional effect. They discussed the irony of the situation, foreshadowing, fate, superstition, characterization, and satire. Their journal entries each day led into the discussion of the story. For example, the topics were: “How much control do I have over my life?”, “Am I superstitious?”, and “Is Mary Malone crazy or not?”. The main participation structure was a teacher-led discussion with students referring to their study guide questions.
There was also group work to review the study questions before the discussion. On the last day, the class began a writing activity using a writing process that included four steps to produce a poem on colors. The teacher started their thinking with a color inventory which was discussed and answers shared. The students then brainstormed colors and emotions by drawing a sensory map of the emotion with rays for “I see”, “I feel”, “I hear”, “I smell”, “I taste”, and “I touch”. The four steps were then explained. The teacher was positive and reassuring with comments such as: “It never fails. You’re going to have a beautiful poem. Trust me. I’ve done this for years and it works every time.” The students then worked on their own to begin the poem which was to be completed for homework. The social climate was warm and positive with very few put-downs between students. The teacher assisted the instructional climate by bringing in a rabbit’s foot to begin the discussion on superstition, apple cinnamon scent which she explained had been found to have a calming effect and keep students focused, and reading old epitaphs including one she wrote for the character in one of the stories. She also discussed her own family and its traditions. Her communication style was direct and students were warned often.

The Delta class (lowest track) consisted of 18 students. There were three language-minority students and three mainstreamed Special Education students in the class. The students in this class were working on worksheets
dealing with labels and signs on the topics of “On the Highway” and “On the Street”. They also did worksheets on homonyms. On two days, they wrote in journals with topics including: “What your family is like during dinner” and “What is your favorite place to be?”. Prior to beginning the worksheets, they copied vocabulary words from a list the teacher wrote on the board and had to write a definition for each word. Students then volunteered to give their definitions for these words that were included in the worksheets. They then worked individually for fifteen to thirty minutes on the worksheets before putting them back in the folders to be continued the next day in class. The teacher kept the folders in class and passed them out each day. Their homework assignment for that evening was to write specific directions to get to their homes. The next day, the answers were reviewed in class and students made corrections. The next night’s assignment was to bring something in to class that had directions on it. On the third day, the students were put into pairs to do a vocabulary review and these were corrected orally. On the fourth day of observation, the students did a listening activity in which the teacher read three paragraphs and the students had to choose from three multiple choice answers. That night, the students were assigned to read a handout and had eight minutes in class to complete it. The fifth day, the students reviewed homonyms and then did two worksheets on spelling errors or homonym errors. They had fifteen minutes to complete the worksheets and then were put in
pairs to compare answers. They then corrected the worksheets orally. The teacher's communication style remained very supportive and warm with encouraging comments such as: "What's nice about this class is that you all have nice penmanship" and "Have faith in yourself". However, the student behavior was so unruly that she had to constantly count to get the students to quiet down and there were constant verbal reprimands to misbehaving students. The social climate among the students was filled with put-downs, name-calling, arguments, and comments to belittle the language-minority students. Certain students threw paper wads into the garbage and pencils across the room, made noises, and pantomimed to others across the room. When starting the journals, one student raised his hand and asked, "Can we swear in our journals?" The teacher continually tried intervention strategies and kept several students after class to discuss class behavior. She asked if he wanted to move to be able to concentrate better. Before class began, the student-to-student interaction was generally negative. Comments such as "What'd you do, fart?" and negative comments such as "She's an old bag" about other teachers were overheard. One student stood up during class and threatened another student. On the fourth day, one unruly Special Ed student who had been given an after-school detention told her, "You can take it up with my Dad when he brings in a 45 and blows you away." This student was removed from the class by the Deans' Office.
On three of the observation days, certain teacher behaviors were documented using concepts from the TESA interaction model. This was helpful for the researcher to focus on certain teacher behaviors, but it is important to keep in mind that this interaction model was designed to be used in watching interaction with target students within the same class period. The researcher in this study used the concepts, but with different class periods so there obviously are differences in the lesson design and the opportunities for response were not the same due to lesson differences and differences in the number of students in the class. The researcher also recombined the TESA concepts to look at four behaviors each of three days. On day two, response opportunities were documented with four specific behaviors being individual helping, latency or wait time, rephrasing, and higher-level questioning. Each incidence of the behavior could be coded with a positive code or a negative code. Teacher A gave more individual helping, more wait time, and more rephrasing of questions to her Delta class. She used higher-level questioning three times with her Alpha class and zero times with her Delta class on the day this was documented. On day three, feedback techniques were documented with the four specific behaviors being methods of affirming or correcting, praise of learning, reasons for praise, and accepting student’s feelings. Teacher A affirmed more, gave reasons for praise more, and accepted feelings more with her Alpha class. The Delta class was given praise more and there
were zero incidents of accepting feelings. On day four, personal regard was documented with the four specific behaviors being proximity, courtesy, compliments, and method of desisting or correcting student behavior. Teacher A received more positive codes for proximity, courtesy, and compliments with her Alpha class. The desisting codes were the same for both classes with six incidents of each.

Teacher B:

The researcher observed an Alpha (high-track) Freshman English class and a Gamma (low-track) Freshman English class on the following dates: September 13, 16, 29 and October 14 and 19 of 1993. There were sixteen students in the Alpha class. This class was doing a short story unit on the first two days of observation. The teacher's objective on day one was for the students to learn how to read a text. He designed a small group situation in which the students had to write five questions to help them unlock the text. He warned them to look for syntactical, grammatical, and image patterns, dialog, and conflict. The groups then volunteered their questions as the starting point for the whole-class discussion of the piece. The discussion centered on gender stereotyping in "The Girl". The homework assignment was to write a story about a conversation the student had had with his or her parents in which it was a one-way dialogue. They were to try to use the same style and imagery as the author of the short story had used. The second day, the students
finished the video *Tootsie* and continued the discussion of gender stereotyping based on the video and the short story. Their homework was to read the next short story, "Dog Life". On the third day, the class began a unit on mythology which included journal entries about their personal myths and previewing a new textbook on mythology. They also discussed aesthetics and the last short story. On the fourth day, the teacher reviewed grades individually with each student while the class worked silently on worksheets on homonyms and on completion of their oral presentations on mythology. The fifth day, the students had already begun reading *The Iliad*. The journal entry was about a dispute that the student had had with someone in the past. This was used as an introduction to the discussion of the epic poem, its origins, and various translations. The discussion included the Greek gods and their importance to the epic poem. He gave them three different translation sheets and the homework was to read all three and take notes on them. Teacher B used a great deal of humor in his communication style with his students. He constantly wove into class discussions references to current rock bands, television characters, and movies to help the students understand the material. Examples of this abound: when talking about Helen of Troy, "This was real ‘LA Law’ stuff"; the bard Homer was likened to the rapper Ice Cube; and when no one answered his question, he repeated "Buehler, Buehler". More importantly, he made references, in both levels of classes, to... “when you’re in college” and
what will be expected of them. "You should feel proud of what you're learning in here. We used this story when I taught at UIC as a grad student." He was also quick to admit that he had trouble understanding a piece or that it may have been difficult to read. "I know this is heady stuff, but I think you guys can get in touch with it." The social climate was further enhanced by lots of praise, singing to students on their birthdays, and references to what an "astute class" they were. The teacher exhibited enthusiasm for the material being presented. While showing students how prefixes work he stated, "I love this stuff. Isn't this great?" During class discussions, he walked around the room and used proximity to include all students in the discussion. The textbooks used in the class were *Arrangements in Literature and Mythology* and *You*.

Teacher B's Gamma (low-track) class had 21 students in it. He used exactly the same lesson plans for this class for the first two days. He used the same short story "The Girl" and the same video to discuss gender stereotyping. On the third day, the journal entry assignment was: "Describe an experience when you were terrified of something". Next, he read poems from their textbook as he told the students, "Think of ourselves for the next 30 minutes as animals." They then discussed the poems, the images created by the poets, and the parallels between the poems. The assignment for the last five minutes was to begin a 10-line poem written as an animal. He wrote examples of how to start the first two lines using the language of the poems.
The homework assignment was to read two chapters in the new book, *Rumblefish*. The fourth day was used to individually review grades while the rest of the class completed worksheets on homophones and studied for a quiz the next day. On the fifth day, the journal assignment was: “Describe in detail the last time you lied to someone”. This was used to lead into a discussion on the short stories “Big Foot Stole My Wife” and “The Big Trip”. The discussion focused on the role of the narrator and the different types of narrators. The teacher’s communication style was the same as with the other class observed. He even made the same comments about the story being used at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The textbook used in this class was *Journeys* and the novel was *Rumblefish* by S.E. Hinton.

On day two, the researcher coded for response opportunities. Teacher B did the same amount of individual helping and latency for the two classes. He rephrased more often with the Alpha class and he used higher level questioning more often with the Alpha class. On day three, feedback was documented. He affirmed student responses and praised student learning performance exactly the same number of times in the two classes. He gave more reasons for praise and more accepting of student feelings in the Alpha class. On day four, personal regard was documented. Teacher B used proximity, courtesy, compliments, and desisting more in the Gamma class than in the Alpha class. It
should be noted that there are more students in the Gamma class than in the
Alpha class.

Teacher C:

The researcher observed an Alpha (high-track) Freshman English class
and a low-track repeater Speech class on the following dates: September 13,
September 15, September 29, October 13, and October 14. There were 17
students in the Alpha class (fifteen girls and two boys). The class began each
day with D.O.L.s (Daily Oral Language) on the overhead transparency. All
students made the grammatical corrections and wrote the sentences in their
notebooks. One student volunteered each day to orally correct the errors. On
day one, the students took a short quiz after the D.O.L.s. The teacher then
explained the writing assignment based on a story read by the class. The
students were to either continue the story or take one incident and tell the
story from another point of view. They were to think about the feelings,
thoughts, and fears of the characters. To illustrate point of view, he read “The
Three Little Pigs” from the wolf’s point of view. The students had the rest of
the period to write while the teacher walked around to help individual students
with problems. On day two, after the D.O.L.s, the students took out their
rough drafts of their writing assignment. The teacher then began a discussion
about what they liked in a story and the elements of a story such as action,
techniques, detail, comedy, and plot. The students were put in groups of three
to read their papers to each other and to tell each other two things that they liked about each paper. The next step was to combine groups and reread the papers to the larger group. He also reminded them that book reviews were due soon. On day three, after the D.O.L.s, the students handed in the rough drafts. He then began an explanation of a plot outline and literary terms with students contributing answers freely. They discussed exposition, types of conflict, and climax. They then read a story orally and stopped to identify the parts of the story and discuss the elements of it. The fourth day, the students signed up for book talks and for an upcoming field trip to the Rialto Theater as they worked on the D.O.L.s. They then reviewed the literary terms as related to “The Scarlet Ibis”. Next, the students formed small groups to make a puzzle using the vocabulary words from the story. On day five, after the D.O.L.s, the students formed the same small groups and competed against each other in a vocabulary review game. They had to spell the word correctly and give its definition to earn a point. Other groups could challenge with a better definition and get the point. After the game, the groups exchanged the puzzles that they had made yesterday. Each group then had to solve the puzzle made by another group. The puzzles included wordsearches, crosswords, and even one that cut the words up into pieces which had to be reassembled. This was all part of the review for the test the next day. The communication style of the teacher was easy-going and relaxed with a strong
concern for the students. It was a quiet class and he worked hard to elicit their responses using humor such as: “I know you’re alive” and asking personal questions: “How’s your arm?” and “How are the cheerleaders doing?” When beginning the peer editing in the small group work, he told the students that even teachers in a writing class are apologetic and shy. He told them that writing was a personal thing and therefore difficult to share because of fear of rejection. He explained, “The goal is for you to get used to the idea that people are here to help you.” The students were encouraged to call out answers during the discussions and there was a friendly give-and-take between teacher and students.

The low-track class that Teacher C taught was a class for students who failed Freshman English so there were Sophomores, Juniors, and even some Seniors who had failed several times. It was a Speech class with 20 students in it (fifteen boys and five girls). The students were working in groups for their first presentation which was to be a collage about the group members. The teacher reviewed the requirements for the presentation. Each group had to choose a name, have an introduction, a conclusion, and get everyone in the group introduced. The teacher walked around conferring with the groups while they worked on the collages. He tried to keep the groups on task and urged them to continue working with individual comments such as, “Scott, what’s something you’re good at?”. The student’s response was, “To get out of
The groups had all period to work, but some groups accomplished little or nothing. On the second day, the groups had to answer some questions about how their group was functioning and how much they were accomplishing. They then continued group work on the collages and presentations. On day three, the students were in the library doing research for their next oral presentation. They were still working in groups. They had chosen their own topics which included child abuse, serial killers, gangs, and cults. Many of the students did not know how to do research and needed to be constantly guided by the teacher and the librarians. On day four, the first group scheduled to present could not do their presentation because one of the girls had run away from home and the police had just picked her up at school. The second group had one member absent, but decided to do the presentation anyway rather than risk a drop in grade. The teacher reminded the class that they had chosen to be evaluated in four parts including a self-evaluation and a class evaluation. The class members were to evaluate on organization, information, and eye contact. The group did their presentation about low-rider cars and showed a video as they spoke. The teacher then commented about ways to improve the presentation and what he liked best. He then passed out evaluation forms for the group to evaluate themselves and warned them to be fair to each other. He then assigned each student a five-paragraph expository essay on the material from the speeches as a way to get ready for the IGAP (Illinois
Goal Assessment Program) tests in March. At the end of the period, he collected the class evaluations and commented, “You guys really did a nice job—accurate and fair.” On day five, one student did his presentation on graffiti art, graffiti vandalism, and tagger crews. He also included a video showing taggers in New York. After the evaluations were collected, the teacher initiated a discussion about tagger crews, “What about my right as a landowner?” A student from the back of the room answered, “Then we’ll have to blow your head off.” This chilling statement was an indicator of the negative social climate among the students of this class. All of these students had failed previous classes, some of them several times, and were presently put all together in one class. The behavior of the students was in stark contrast to the behavior of the Alpha class that the researcher observed with the same teacher. On the first day, two students began to argue at the beginning of the class and walked outside to continue. The teacher physically brought them back in and commented, “Kill each other later.” Every day, most of the students waited outside the door until after the bell had rung and then slowly sauntered in. During the time given for group work, the discussion among some group members was dominated by obscene language, talk about guns and violence, discussion of a guy who killed his baby, and about the class member who ran away from home. In spite of this negative student behavior, the teacher worked tirelessly with each group urging them to think about their
goals for the year and to plan for their presentations. His communication style was still relaxed, but in this class the student behavior necessitated many calls to attention, calls for quiet, and threats of detentions after class.

Due to the group work and group presentation format of the low-track class, the behavior coding done on days two, three, and four may be less valid than with the other teachers. The response opportunities coding showed that he did more individual helping, more latency, more rephrasing, and more higher-level questioning with the Alpha class. The feedback coding showed that he did more affirming of student performance, more praise, more reasons for praise, and more accepting of feelings with the Alpha class. As to personal regard, he used proximity and courtesy more with the Alpha class and also corrected their behavior more. He did, however, compliment or make statements related to the student’s personal interests more in the low-track class.

Teacher D:

A 1H (high-track) Freshman English class and a 1B (low-track) Freshman English class were observed on the following dates: October 4, 6, 8, 18, and 20 of 1993. There were 27 students in the Honors class (twelve boys and fifteen girls). The first day, all students arrived on time and the period was spent reviewing for the short story test the next day. The teacher explained the format of the test (matching, literary terms, short answer, and one essay) and then opened up discussion for the review questions that they had prepared
the night before. He also discussed and wrote on the board six tactics to use in the essay part of the test. He gave examples of topic sentences and how many different ideas should be included. The test would cover the short stories included in the text *Literature and Language*. Another student asked if the summer reading would be included and he replied that the summer journals were equivalent to the point count for the test. When the students had exhausted their questions, the class had the rest of the period for independent reading and the teacher read also. On day two, the teacher passed out their folders with the graded informal writings and also passed out TAB book order forms. The students then began an informal writing which began “My life has some illusion...”. They had fifteen minutes to write on the topic and then put the papers in their folders and passed them up. The next activity was oral reading of the play, *The Hitchhiker*. The students eagerly volunteered to take the parts and even do sound effects. On day three, the teacher conferred individually with each student about their rough-draft poems. He then read poems from the text and pointed out how the poet used similes and metaphors. He then began a discussion about narrative poetry versus lyric poetry. He also listed on the board qualities that show up a lot in Longfellow’s poems since the class was reading *Evangeline*. Finally, he passed back the short story tests and reviewed the grading procedure. On the fourth day, he passed back their graded poems and read aloud one poem that he particularly liked
because of its strong sensory description, strong tone, strong imagery and figures of speech. He then gave a reading quiz over Part I of Evangeline. After the quiz, he reviewed the correct answers and discussed the previous night's reading assignment. Students then volunteered to read orally and he stopped them occasionally to point out Longfellow’s point of view, important imagery or to ask questions. The fifth day began with a reading quiz on Part II of Evangeline. He then quizzed them orally on the reading assignment focusing on the mood and pattern of imagery. The students voted to continue reading silently for the rest of the period. The communication style of the teacher was extremely courteous, always addressing the class members as “Ladies and Gentlemen”, and modelling excellent usage of the English language with a very precise vocabulary. As to social climate, the class members were talkative and usually buzzing until he called for quiet. The talk among the students concerned grades, tests, and school activities with no noted incidents of personal put-downs. Several of the boys were seen twisting arms, but stopped immediately when told to. There was great anticipation when tests and papers were handed back and the grades were taken very seriously. All class members kept their notes in three-ring notebooks with the school crest and English printed on the cover in gold letters.

The Basic (low-track) Freshman English class had 14 students in it (ten boys and four girls). On day one, the students worked in their workbooks
Building Skills on helping verbs and verb phrases. They did several sections in the workbook and then volunteered to read their answers while correcting the work. Next, they got out their other textbook, Scope, to discuss “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” focusing on story order versus chronological order. He then handed out a section review worksheet for them to complete. The worksheet included study notes on plot outline and literary terms. The homework was to choose one story and match the events to parts of the plot outline. They had the last ten minutes of class to begin the homework. On the second day, the students did a test in the workbook on pronouns and tenses of verbs. They then exchanged papers and graded them in class. He then passed out a two-paragraph story for the students to silently read. They reviewed the seven questions orally and discussed characterization in the story. They then opened the textbooks to “The Homeplace” and discussed the dilemma in the story. The homework was to read “Angelina Sandoval” in the text. The third day, the students began with the workbook on supporting ideas in a paragraph. He then discussed inferences and gave an example of one. He passed out a handout on making inferences and reviewed it. They then opened their textbooks to discuss “Angelina Sandoval”. Next, they read the introduction to the story “The Brutal Tale of a Teenage Gang Leader” which was written in 1958. He read the story aloud to the students for a few minutes and then allowed them to continue reading silently. On day four, the class began with the work-
book and a review of the 'be' verbs and verb tenses. They did several exercises and then corrected them orally. The next activity was a ten-minute informal writing piece on “My Morning Routine”. He then passed back a graded test on the short stories and reviewed the grading. Next, he introduced a story in the textbook and students read silently until the end of the period. The fifth day began with workbook pages on verbs and supporting sentences in a paragraph. The pages were reviewed orally and corrected. The next activity was an informal writing piece entitled “My Gourmet Masterpiece”. The students were given a handout as an organizer in which they listed seven items that they had made before and did a visual map of the ingredients or steps in the process. From that, they wrote a rough draft of a paragraph and completed it for homework. The teacher’s communication style with this class was equally courteous, but marked by many more warnings to be quiet and pay attention, repetitions, and explanations of directions or of vocabulary words. Although this class was actually quieter than the larger Honors class, the social climate among the students was much more rancorous, with more put-downs like: “He flunked Home Ec” or “Shut up, Lisa”. There was loud laughter when a paper was returned and someone announced, “I got an F+.” The researcher observed students discussing a fight between two girls and the extent of her injuries, “I hear she’s really messed up”. Another day at the end of class, a student got up and pretended to kick another student and pulled his backpack
off his desk. Still another day, a boy and girl got into a verbal scrap before class with each saying, "Shut the f--- up" to the other. He continued, "You look like ----." They continued with put-downs for quite a while after class began. The teacher did not hear or did not respond to any of these situations since most occurred before or during the last several minutes of class when the students were given time to talk.

On the day that response opportunities were coded, the teacher gave more individual helping, more latency or wait time, did more rephrasing of questions, and asked more higher-level questions to the low-track class. On the next day when feedback was coded, he affirmed more student responses, praised students more, and gave more reasons for praise in the high-track class. There were no incidents of accepting student's feelings in either class. On the following day when personal regard was coded, the teacher used proximity and expressions of courtesy more with the high-track class. He complimented or asked questions related to the student's personal interests more in the low-track class. The incidents of desisting or correcting student behavior in a calm, courteous way were the same, three in each class.

Teacher E:

A Core/Excel (regular-track) Freshman English class and a Basic (low-track) Freshman English class were observed on the following dates: November 15, 17, 18, 19, and 22 of 1993. This school had only two ability levels of
English at the Freshman level, but the Core-Excel was a special team-taught class. There were 26 students in the Core class (thirteen boys and thirteen girls). On day one, the students were beginning to read *The Odyssey*. The teacher discussed with them what was known about the author, what an epic poem was, and background on the Trojan War. Throughout the discussion, the teacher asked questions and the students very willingly volunteered answers. The students had just studied the Greeks in their Social Studies class so they were very familiar with the material. They were reading the shortened version of *The Odyssey* in their textbook *Adventures in Reading*. The teacher began reading the poem to them and stopped to ask questions to check for understanding or stopped to discuss the meaning of a word. Students were quick to answer her questions. She directed them to answer the study guide questions, write two journal entries, copy the vocabulary, and take notes on the assigned pages as classwork or homework if not completed in class. The journal entries were to be a log written by Odysseus describing each place that he stopped. She advised them that they could use their notes on the next day’s quiz. They were given the last twenty minutes of class to read and begin the assignment. On the second day, she announced a national essay contest and encouraged them to enter. She then gave them the quiz over the last night’s reading and they reviewed the correct answers after handing it in. She then discussed the last reading assignment and introduced the next assign-
ment. Again the students had to complete study guide questions, copy vocabulary, read the poem, and write two journal entries. They had the last twenty-five minutes of class to read. On day three, the class began with a discussion of the reading assignment including the question, “Do you think it was honorable that the captain didn’t tell the crew that six would die when he chose to hit the rock instead of the whirlpool?” In introducing the new day’s assignment, she asked, “Mike, if you had a girlfriend and you were gone for a long time, would you want to come back disguised to see who your real friends are?” The assignment was two more sections of the poem, study guide questions, and two more journal entries. They had thirty minutes to read in class. On the fourth day, she questioned them on the reading and discussed dramatic irony. In introducing the next sections, she challenged them to make some predictions about the kind of tests the suitors of Penelope would have to perform. They read in class for forty minutes. The fifth day began with a vocabulary review and questions about the poem. The students eagerly volunteered answers, but she also called on students who were not volunteering. The assignments were the same with three journal entries, study questions, vocabulary, and reading the last sections. She also discussed the upcoming test and told them that Romeo and Juliet would be the next piece. Each day while the students were reading, the teacher walked up and down the aisles helping students and making sure that they were on task. The communi-
cation style of the teacher was fast-paced, direct, and student-centered. She encouraged students to participate in school activities such as the play and gave out study guides in advance for students in the play. She also offered to give extra help to students having problems and told them that she was in the building at 6:30 a.m. each morning for extra help. She dealt with misbehaving students in a humorous, but firm manner with comments such as, “Discuss it during your lunch period.”

The Basic class had only 12 students (three boys and nine girls). The textbook was Reading Literature. On the first day of observation, the teacher announced that the students would be working in pairs to do a presentation on an assigned short story. Each pair would read the story to the class, choose four vocabulary words and their definitions, and make up a quiz for the other class members to take. The pair also had to decide on the moral of the story and write discussion questions for the other students to answer. Some of the stories were in the textbook and others were on handouts. The students had forty minutes to prepare the presentations in class. Day two started with an open-note quiz on “A Crown of Wild Olive”. The first group gave their presentation on the story “Greedy and Speedy” as the rest of the class took notes. They then took the quiz that had been written by the presenters and exchanged papers to grade the quizzes in class. Next came the discussion questions. The next pair read “The Greedy Crow” to the class, followed by a
quiz and the discussion questions. At the end of the class, the teacher signed a number of sheets that the students are required to take around daily to each teacher. Day three began with the announcement that everyone needed to take the test over again due to poor grades. They were assigned to write a two-paragraph essay comparing the two characters in the story. She gave them the topic sentence for each paragraph and brainstormed with them on the similarities and differences between the two men. This was the homework assignment for the evening in addition to studying for the spelling test. Another pair read their story and did their presentation. On the fourth day, the students handed in their essays, took the weekly spelling test, and exchanged papers to grade the test. The next two groups gave their presentations. On the fifth day of observation, the last group presentations were continuing with the quizzes and discussion questions done by each pair. She then reviewed the literary terms of the plot outline and gave them a one-page story to read with questions to answer. The social climate among the students reflected their awareness of their placement in a low-track class with comments such as, “What do you mean a broader scope? We’re not that high in English.” The students’ reaction to the group work on the first day of observation was: “You’re showing off for her (the researcher)” and “Do you have a life?” There were a number of off-color comments and put-downs exchanged between students. Sadly, a student who showed up with a black
eye and a cut on her chin was asked by another student, “Who beat you up?” This was after the student had told the teacher that she had fallen down the stairs at home.

On the day that response opportunities were coded, the teacher gave more individual helping, more latency or wait time, and asked more higher-level questions to the regular-track class. She rephrased more with the lower-track class, but also received more negative codes for leaving students without rephrasing or giving clues. On the next day when feedback was coded, she gave more affirmation that student work was acceptable and more praise of learning to the regular-track class. There were no instances of giving reasons for praise or of accepting student’s feelings in either class. On the fourth day of observation when personal regard was documented, she used proximity more, used more expressions of courtesy, and gave more compliments or statements related to the student’s personal interests to the regular-track class. There were many more corrections of student behavior in the lower-track class.

**Analysis of Data**

**Research Question One:**

Are there observable teacher behavior differences in the way a teacher interacts with different ability groups of students?
All five teachers stated in their interviews that they did interact differently with the different ability groups of students. Teacher A stated that although she tried to build a rapport faster with the lower-track class, “I think my teaching style is pretty much the same, but everything is slowed down, my voice and what I give them. I allow more nonsense with them...” Teacher B saw the dynamics of the classes as different due to the number of students in the classes and also used a more sophisticated rhetoric with the higher-track class. Teacher C answered, “The one class needs more guidance and have more behavior problems which you deal with in a different way than you would with the other class. I find myself being more animated in the lower level over the other or feeling the need to be touching each group as much as I can.” Teacher D agreed that his language choice was different, his expectations for student response were different, and he gave more latitude to the lower-level students. Concerning the higher-level class, “There’s an assumption on my part that the honors students are capable of more abstract concepts and so the things I choose to discuss with them reflect that.” Teacher E agreed that there were differences in the level of discussion, testing, and maturity level.

The supervisors did not agree on this question. The supervisor of teachers B and C observed that the teachers are stricter and have a more rigid class behavior structure with the low-ability groups to keep the kids on task because they are more easily distracted. The supervisor of teacher D
said, "The short answer is no. It's more the personality of the class. Some classes can run a loose manner. It's more dependent on the students than on the ability level." The supervisor of teacher E answered yes. She had seen that teachers of lower-level classes were more concerned with structure and routine, provided more activities within the class period, used smaller group sizes, and called the students to attention more often. She noted that high-track teachers gave a greater latitude for student behavior because they could call the students back to attention more easily and it didn’t take as much time to get them back on task.

The results of the coding from the TESA interaction model showed that the teachers did interact differently with the different ability grouped classes. When the coded behaviors were totalled for all five teachers, the results were that the teachers were twice as likely to give individual help, use latency or wait time, use higher-level questioning, affirm student performance, give reasons for praise, accept student's feelings, come within an arm's length of the student, and use expressions of courtesy in their high-track class. Two other categories were also used more often in the high-track class. These included praise of learning and asking questions relating to the student's personal interests. Rephrasing or giving clues was the one category that the two levels were almost equal in, but there were more negative codes for the lower-track class. The negative code in this behavior meant that the teacher left the student
without rephrasing when the student didn’t answer. Out of twelve coded behaviors, the only behavior that was used more in the lower-track class was that of desisting or correcting student behavior in a calm, courteous way. The most striking difference occurred in the higher-level questioning category where the behavior was used five times more often in the higher-track class than in the lower-track class.

Research Question Two:

Are there different instructional techniques chosen by the teacher to use with the different ability groups?

Two of the teachers answered yes to this question. Two answered no and one teacher answered yes and no. Of the two who answered yes, Teacher A cited writing more on the board, giving samples of what to do, keeping everything very short and concrete, and using a variety of activities with the low-track class. Teacher E gave examples of how she structured the lower-track class differently by reading aloud more, reviewing vocabulary more, and giving the topic sentences for the essays. She also used group work more because these students needed to be able to get along with each other. She assigned more reading at home to be done by the high-track class and more studying at home. Of the two teachers answering no, Teacher B was the most emphatic, “I believe that class is a place where students and teachers talk
interactively and where students are writing. They are also working in small groups. The three techniques are the same with both sections.” Teacher C also answered no stating that he used the same techniques in both classes and varied the techniques as often as he could. He did try to build a relationship with the lower-level class faster in order to control the class. Teacher D answered yes and no because he believed that the process was the same, but the difference would be in the speed with which that was delivered and how much of a visual aid was provided.

All of the supervisors answered yes to this question. The supervisor of teachers B and C observed that in the high-track classes there were more higher-level thinking skills and more mixture of traditional lecture/discussion with non-traditional techniques such as cooperative learning. In the low-track classes, there was more straight instruction, the teachers were more redundant, and the classes were better structured with more fundamental objectives. The supervisor of teacher D had observed that all of her teachers were moving from the teacher-oriented classroom to the student-oriented classroom. She had seen more cooperative learning and more of the student-oriented things in the low-track classes because the teachers were struggling to find different ways to keep and hold the student’s attention. The supervisor of teacher E noted smaller group sizes and more handouts given to the low-
track classes. Her teachers were using more organizers for both levels, but still expected the high-track students to take more notes in class.

The classroom observations documented that teachers used smaller group sizes in the low-track classes. Only one teacher allowed the low-track students to work with more than one other student. The low-track classes spent an inordinate amount of time doing worksheets or workbook pages and their group work dealt with reviewing these worksheets to agree on answers or to prepare for oral presentations. The high-track classes spent much more time discussing the reading assignments with their teachers and answering questions orally. The study guide questions and worksheets were done as homework in the high-track classes, so that the class period could be used to discuss the reading material. Group work in the high-track classes was structured to give feedback in the peer-editing process, create puzzles for vocabulary review, write questions to unlock the text, or function as a team in a review contest. Although both levels used journal writing or informal writing as a technique, the topic assignments varied widely often because of the wide variance in curriculum content. While the high-track classes in school E were writing first-person entries as Odysseus would have written his log, the low-track classes were writing discussion questions from their story “The Greedy Crow”. In school D, the high-track students were reading *Evangeline* by Longfellow while the low-track students were reading “Angelina Sandoval” and
writing about "My Gourmet Masterpiece". In school B, the high-track students were struggling with three translations of *The Iliad*, while their counterparts in the low-track class were reading "Bigfoot Stole My Wife" and would be starting *Rumblefish* as their novel. In school A, the high-track class read classic short stories such as "The Monkey's Paw" and looked forward to beginning *Romeo and Juliet*, while the low-track class worked on worksheets on labels and signs.

**Research Question Three:**

Are there differences in communication styles, both verbal and nonverbal, used by teachers with different ability groups?

Four teachers answered yes to this question, while one teacher was not sure he could give a yes or no answer. Teacher A reported that she was more nurturing, did more touching, and could peg their needs faster with the low-track class because they were more verbal and disinhibited. She felt that she also used more nonverbals (an expression or a touch on the shoulder) with the low-track to avoid distracting the other students. On the other hand, she could be more direct with the high-track students in telling them to change behavior, their comments were smarter and they were smarter power strugglers. She would talk to a high-track student outside of the classroom to avoid getting into a power struggle, but this was not necessary in a low-track class. Teacher B admitted that his rhetoric was more sophisticated with the
high-track class, but attributed this difference to the curriculum that he was
given. He explained, “Because we are tracked, The Iliad is more sophisticated
than Rumblefish.” He walked around the room to keep the students on task as
a nonverbal and did this in both levels. Teacher D used tone of voice and pace
in different ways. In the low-track class, he repeated more, wrote definitions
on the board instead of only giving them orally, and used physical proximity
more. His nonverbal cues were more visible with the low-track also. Teacher E
also repeated more, probed more for answers, gave more hints, and called for
attention more in the low-track class. Teacher C could not give a yes or no
answer because he used verbal and nonverbal communication to cue students
for behavior or to cue to keep on task in both levels. The difference was the
number of times that this was necessary. In the low-track class, it was
necessary to cue more often for behavior management.

All of the supervisors noted differences in the communication styles to
some degree. The supervisor of teacher B and C noticed it most often with the
verbal communication style. In the low-track class, there was more redundan-
cy and restating. With nonverbals, the teachers were more animated in the
lower-track classes to change the feeling tone and to raise the level of concern.
They also used position to temper any acting up. The supervisor of teacher D
noted that low-track teachers stopped to explain words more and may have
been louder, more forceful or more direct, but she had not seen any body
language or rude remarks directed at a student because of their ability level.
The supervisor of teacher E remarked that teachers moved in to the student
who was misbehaving and this may have been done more often in a lower-
ability class where there were more students who could act out. She did not
think that the teachers were Jekylls and Hydes who changed their style
because of the ability level of the class.

Research Question Four:

Are there differences in the amount of time spent on actual instruction in
the different ability groups?

Teacher A stated that she gave a lot less play time to the high-track
students than to the low-track students. Teacher B believed that he gave
more instruction time to the lower level because it was perceived that they
were less self-motivated so he worked harder to get them to learn. He tried
to give the same amount of instruction time in both classes. Teacher C noted
that he spent more time in the low-track class working on behavior because
the students were not as self-motivated or interested as the high-track
students were. He did not believe that this was due to lack of skills, but rather
to lack of interest. Teacher D stated that it depended on the material that the
class was working on and on the students themselves and the chemistry.
Typically, he spent more time with classroom management in the low-track
class and gave about the same amount of time in class for homework.

Teacher E felt that the regular-track students were more interested in background information and that she could talk more in class with them. She gave a lot more homework and there was less wasted time in the regular-track class. In the lower-track class, the students took longer to start on an assignment, made fun of each other more, and were more easily distracted.

The supervisor of teachers B and C saw no difference in the amount of instruction time if instruction was defined as input and practice. He stated, "The type of instruction changes, but the amount doesn't." The supervisor of Teacher D agreed that there was no difference because she believed that giving time to do homework could actually be instruction or what Madeline Hunter called guided practice. She believed that high-track students actually got a bad break because they were expected to read the material and be tested on it without having a chance to talk about it in class. She noted that homework expectations were vastly different in the two levels with the low-track students who would not do it at home and had never been expected to. Her low-track teachers felt that their students were getting special, almost preferential treatment now and they thought it would be too bad to throw them into the mainstream with a sink-or-swim attitude. "I guess they were overprotective and saw them as little lost souls trying to read The Odyssey."

The supervisor of teacher E observed that low-track lessons were more self-
contained to the class period because of student absences and were, therefore, less dependent on outside work. The teachers assigned less homework because they didn’t expect that the students would do it. Therefore, there was more oral reading and more guided practice in class with low-track classes. In high-track classes, the expectation was that the student would prepare overnight and the sequence had fewer gaps because the students were in class more.

The classroom observations documented that there was more time spent on classroom management and calling students to attention in the low-track classes. All of the teachers started with the bell and usually took attendance during the journal-writing time period. There were more distractions during the low-track classes due to student behavior, students arriving late or strolling into class from the door, calls from the Deans’ Office or the Attendance Office, and teachers having to explain makeup work due to previous absences.

**Research Question Five:**

Are there classroom climate differences in the different ability groups?

The teachers all emphatically answered yes to this question. Teacher A stated that the high-track students tended to be more cliquish while the low-track students were more open, disinhibited, and worked together more
readily. She did have one incident where two low-track students refused to work with each other because the Hispanic student said that the other student was prejudiced against her. The teacher had to intervene and talk to both of them about the situation. Teacher B blamed the differences in social climate on tracking. The high-track students knew that they were good students, were in the best classes, and had the best instruction. They were better behaved and more focused. He felt that the low-track students felt resentment at being categorized and only conformed to the expectations of that community. He tried to overcome this by telling the low-track students that he taught the same in both classes to empower the low-track students to go on to college.

He has seen repercussions among staff members because of teaching assignment differences. Teacher D also noted distinct differences in chemistry in relationships between students and teacher and students and students. He noted that he was more formal with the low-track classes for the purpose of classroom management and more direct and assertive with them. With high-track students, a verbal caution was all that was necessary to stop misbehavior, but low-track students needed the verbal suggestion to be reenforced by detentions more frequently. He also noted qualitative differences in the interaction between students with low-track students being less supportive of one another and more challenging of one another. He observed less put-downs in the high-track class and students making friendlier bonds. Teacher E agreed
that there definitely was a different social climate. The low-track students were less involved in school activities, complained more, did less homework, needed more prompting to get to work, and expected the teacher to repeat more. She noted more family problems, less parental involvement, and more attention-seeking behavior in the low-track student population also. She felt she must spend a lot more time calling parents and seeing counselors of the low-track students as well as signing their dragsheets.

The supervisor of Teachers B and C stated that the students in the high-track classes knew that they were academically stronger, more “preppy”, and had goals in mind. The low-track students were aware that they were in the lower level, their self-esteem was not as well developed, and they often did not have goals. The supervisor of teacher D agreed that the social climate was different as was the feeling of the class. She had noted more roughhousing and more kidding in a socially unacceptable way in the low-track classes. The high-track classes may have been as noisy, but the discussion was about assignments, tests, and getting things done. The supervisor of teacher E stated that for the most part the answer was no, but she then listed a number of ways that the social climate was different between the two levels. She had noticed a rapport in the low-track classes where there was a warm, forgiving atmosphere due to staff members who were concerned about the whole child and who used a lot of humor. She had seen some low-track
classrooms that were a closely-bonded unit with great rapport and an unwritten pledge to support each other. She saw the high-track classes as more content-structured, businesslike, and less family-centered.

During the fifty periods that the researcher observed in four different schools with five different teachers, the social climate was the most striking difference in the classes other than the content differences. Two of the teachers were female and three were male. Some of the classes were large and some were small. Some of the schools were located in suburban Cook County, some were located in the wealthier DuPage County. None of these differences in setting changed the student behavior in the classrooms. The low-track classrooms had a very different social climate and feeling in spite of caring and professional teachers who obviously were striving to treat the different ability groups in a similar manner. They all recognized the climate differences, as did their supervisors, and discussed possible reasons in their interviews.

The researcher sat in the back of the classroom and was able to note student behaviors that often the teacher did not see while at the blackboard or while conferring with another student. The following description is in no way a condemnation of the participating teachers or a negative reflection on their teaching abilities because the researcher recognizes that they all were striving to provide the same educational opportunities to all levels of students.
the high-track students were often chatty and noisy before class, they quickly
settled down and focused on their work during the class period. They were
easy to call back to attention if they did drift off during a change in activity. A
verbal reprimand by the teacher usually quickly resolved the misbehavior.
Some of the high-track classes were unusually quiet and the teachers had to
probe for answers and ask for discussion. This may have been due to
students coming from different junior highs into large high schools where they
did not know many students. There was a lot of laughter and casual joking in
the high-track classes as well. Many of the students eagerly called out
answers to the teacher’s questions or raised their hands to be selected to
answer or to read aloud. The classroom structure was generally more casual
and there was a sense of anticipation and excitement when tests and papers
were handed back with grades. This was not to say that high-track students
never misbehaved or talked too much, but they sensed when to stop before
the classroom was disrupted. The other students were less likely to be
distracted by someone else’s misbehavior and less likely to get involved in it
because they were more focused on their own assignments.

Most of the high-track classes were larger than the low-track classes,
yet the desisting or correction of the student behavior was substantially more
in the smaller low-track classes. Life in the low-track classes was one distrac-
tion after another. One teacher began counting every time students were noisy
and continued the counting throughout the class period. At the end of the class, the number represented the number of seconds that the entire class had to remain in their seats before being dismissed. Other teachers used individual detentions as backups to verbal warnings. One day, a teacher assigned several thirty-minute detentions and on the day of the detention, one very disruptive student threatened, "You can take it up with my Dad when he brings in a .45 and blows you away." The teacher calmly stated, "OK, you may go. That is a threat and you may explain it to the Dean and the Principal. You’re not serving the detention with me." The student was removed from the class by the Dean.

The students were also more physically challenging of each other. The researcher saw students hit other students as they walked by to sharpen pencils and another student elbow someone in the face. There was one instance in which two male students stood up and walked out of the classroom to fight in the hallway. The teacher had to bring them back into the classroom with the admonition, "Kill each other later." In another classroom, a male and female student began arguing and name-calling before class. They each told the other, "Shut the f--- up." In the same school, two students were talking about two girls who were in a fight the previous day, "I hear she’s really messed up." In yet another school, a girl returned to class with a black eye
and a cut on her chin. Even after explaining to the teacher that she had fallen
down the stairs, she was asked by her partner, “Who beat you up?”

Name-calling was very common among the low-track students while the
teacher was occupied at the doorway before class began. Students also were
seen throwing paper wads, throwing pencils across the room, and making
noises or stamping feet to disrupt the class when the teachers were at the
board. One teacher responded, “I want to be in a place where you are so
together, so cool, so mature that I can write on the board and won’t hear
noises and talking. You’ll get there on your own.”

The teachers used various interventions such as touches on the shoulder
and keeping troublesome students after class to talk to them. One teacher
asked an unruly student after class, “What would make it easier for you to
concentrate. Do you want to move? Let me know. I noticed you were up a
lot.” The teachers continued with positive comments to build self-esteem, yet
the put-downs by other students often had the opposite effect. Remarks such
as: “Shut up”, “You look like ----”, and “Brain tumor” were common. One
student taunted the language-minority students with repeated comments,
“Habla ingles? Habla ingles?” Some students routinely laughed when another
student gave an incorrect answer. Comments overheard among students
before class included: “What’d you do, fart?”, “I hate everyone”, “This place
sucks”, and “You’re wearing gang colors”. A girl who was wearing a school T-
shirt was taunted for wearing “an old shirt”. A student who had a bandage on his arm and explained that he had burned himself on the heater was told by another student, “Are you a klutz or what?” Students were heard discussing other teachers and referring to them as old bags and old farts. At the end of one trying day, a particularly patient teacher told a disruptive student, “I’m not getting into game-playing with you.”

Only one of the five low-track classes observed had a similar social climate to that of the high-track counterpart. This was in the class where the teacher taught the same lesson plans on two of the days and where the teacher stated that he strives to use the same instructional techniques with both levels. He also used proximity well, constantly walking around the room to be near all of the students. This class was larger than his high-track class, yet the researcher observed only one incident of misbehavior when a student was looking out the window in the door and pantomiming to a student outside.

In the only low-track class that allowed more than two students in a group, the teacher asked a student after several days of working, “Where’s your group?” The student replied candidly, “Nowhere.” The groups were able to select any topics of interest to them and their topics were a chilling commentary on society today: child abuse, graffiti vandalism and tagger crews, gangs, cults, serial killers, and low-rider cars. When the teacher interjected into the discussion on tagger crews, “What about my right as a
landowner?” A student in the back of the room stated matter-of-factly, “Then we’ll have to blow your head off.”

Teacher Interview Questions Six and Seven:

Which class does your supervisor normally visit for evaluation? How could your supervisor best help you to prepare for teaching the different ability groups? What support does your school offer you?

The teachers repeated again and again that the best way to prepare them for teaching the different ability groups was to allow them to talk to other teachers who have taught the same level and to invite trusted peers in for peer coaching. They also needed to be supported during the first year in the school and to have the freedom to make mistakes and to try new ideas in the classroom. From their supervisors, they wanted to hear suggestions for improving teaching or something that they were not seeing that was occurring in the classroom. One teacher mentioned that it was important to keep the class sizes small in the low-track classes and to continue a departmental commitment to make sure that the low-track classes did not become a dumping ground for behavioral problems. One teacher suggested that the English curriculum should be brought in line so that students in every level would read three novels, write four papers, and cover the same thematic issues.
Supervisor Question Eight:

What do you think the ramifications of the study will be to administrators and supervisors and how could you use the information that the researcher is gathering?

One supervisor stated, "In all honesty, I do think that detracking is the wave of the future and we're going to have to find a way to deal with it because it's going to be upon us.... If there's somewhere that we can use this information to help us avoid future shock." Another supervisor postulated that this study may not agree with the research in the professional journals and could be used to give guidelines to new teachers to be more successful in different levels of tried teacher behaviors. Another supervisor was interested in the research to see what kind of frustrations the teachers were experiencing so that she could reevaluate the support system. She wanted to make sure that what she has done to make them more effective in their jobs was working. She understood that the low-track teacher had the challenge of recalcitrant or reluctant learners. These teachers must develop strategies to make sure that the low-track students were not being imposed upon by one or two students who had different values.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study and provides conclusions and implications drawn from the analysis of the data. Recommendations for supervisors are included as well as suggestions for further research.

Summary

This study investigated and described teacher behavior in low-track and high-track Freshman English classes in four large high schools located in the suburbs of Chicago. The purpose of the study was to improve supervision by describing differences in teacher behavior with different ability groups of students. The researcher believed that unless administrators and supervisors could recognize and gain insight into the teacher behaviors that lead to academic success and student achievement, they would not be able to assist teachers to analyze and improve their own classroom behaviors. The related literature challenged researchers to “examine the ties between tracking, instruction and learning with more precise information about what actually goes on in classrooms.” (Gamoran, 1987, p. 153) The same writer called on researchers again five years later when he wrote, “Most research on grouping
and achievement has failed to consider how students were treated after they were assigned to their classes.” (Gamoran, 1992, p. 13) Oakes has done the seminal research and written widely on the issue of tracking. Her latest definition of tracking was, “The separation of students into curriculum patterns wherein the courses taken by different students vary widely in expectations, teacher enthusiasm, teaching methods, classroom ambience, and content.” (Goodlad and Oakes, 1988) It was these research findings that prompted this researcher to begin field work in the fall of 1993 into what goes on in these ten classrooms and how these five teachers interacted with their students.

The study had a qualitative design with the intent to investigate and describe teacher behavior through participant observation of ten classrooms and personal interviews of the five teachers and their supervisors. The study used concepts from the Phi Delta Kappa TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement) interaction model to document the classroom interactions on three of the five days. (Kerman and Martin, 1980) The researcher took intensive field notes during the classroom observations and audiotaped the interviews. The researcher documented time usage, lesson content, participation style, instructional technique, communication style, circulation pattern, and classroom climate. Each teacher was observed during five days of instruction in two of the teacher’s classes, one high-track and one low-track.
The importance of the study was that many school administrators are currently trying to deal with the present system of tracking or ability grouping that has caused such unequal access to knowledge and unequal success rates among their students. Goodlad and Oakes suggest a change in this system will require extensive data collection about tracking practices as well as preparation, dialogue, planning, reflection, and liberal experimentation. (Goodlad and Oakes, 1988)

Conclusions

This section answers the five research questions based on the teacher and supervisor interviews as well as the classroom observations. A more in-depth analysis of each research question is included in Chapter Four.

Research Question One: Are there observable teacher behavior differences in the way a teacher interacts with different ability groups of students?

Yes, the field notes from the classroom observations clearly show that there were observable teacher behavior differences. Also, the concepts from the TESA interaction model that were documented on days two, three, and four of the observations show that when the coded behaviors were totalled for all five teachers, the results were that the teachers were twice as likely to give individual help, use latency or wait time, use higher-level questioning, affirm student performance, give reasons for praise, accept student’s feelings, come
within an arm's length of the student, and use expressions of courtesy in their high-track class. Two other behaviors were also used more often in the high-track class: praise of learning and asking questions relating to the student's personal interests. Rephrasing or giving clues was the one category that the two levels were almost equal in, but there were more negative codes for the lower-track class. The negative code in this behavior meant that the teacher left the student without rephrasing when the student didn't answer. Out of twelve coded behaviors, the only behavior that was used more in the low-track class was that of desisting or correcting student behavior in a calm, courteous way. The most striking difference occurred in the higher-level questioning category where the behavior was used five times more often in the high-track class than in the low-track class.

All five teachers in the interviews acknowledged that they interact differently and two of the three supervisors also agreed.

Research Question Two: Are there different instructional techniques chosen by the teacher to use with the different ability groups?

Yes, the classroom observations documented smaller group sizes, more seatwork on worksheets and workbook pages, less lecture/discussion, and lower-level small group topics for the low-track classes. The high-track classes spent more time discussing the reading assignments and answering questions
orally. Their small group work was structured to give feedback in the peer editing process, create puzzles for vocabulary review, write questions to unlock the text, or function as a team in a review contest. Although both levels used journal writing or informal writing as a technique, the topic assignments varied widely often because of the wide variance in curriculum content.

The teachers in their interviews were split on this question with two answering yes, two answering no, and one answering yes and no. All three of the supervisors answered yes.

Research Question Three: Are there differences in communication styles, both verbal and nonverbal, used by teachers with different ability groups?

Yes, the classroom observations documented that although the teachers were all caring and professional in their communication styles with both levels of classes, their attempts to use the same communication styles were often thwarted by differences in student behavior and certainly by the staggering differences in curriculum. It was very difficult to maintain the same level of rhetoric while discussing *The Iliad* with the high-track class and "Bigfoot Stole My Wife" with the low-track class. There were more interruptions to repeat directions, to explain word meanings, and to deal with poor student behavior in the low-track classes.
Four teachers answered yes to this question, while one teacher was not sure he could give a yes or no answer. All of the supervisors noted differences in the communication styles to some degree.

**Research Question Four:** Are there differences in the amount of time spent on actual instruction in the different ability groups?

Yes, the classroom observation documented that there was more time spent on classroom management and calling students to attention in the low-track classes. There were also more distractions during the low-track classes due to student behavior, students arriving late, calls from the Deans' Office, and teachers having to explain makeup work due to previous absences.

All five teachers noted differences in the amount of time spent on actual instruction. The supervisors all stated that there was no difference in the amount of time spent on actual instruction if instruction was defined as input and practice. All agreed that the type of instruction changed, but the amount did not if guided practice was included. All supervisors also noted that less outside reading and preparation were expected of the low-track students, so the lessons were more self-contained to the class period and focused more on oral reading and guided practice.

**Research Question Five:** Are there classroom climate differences in the different ability groups?
Yes, the climate was the most striking difference noted by the researcher in the fifty class periods that were observed. The low-track classrooms had a very different climate and feeling in spite of caring and professional teachers who obviously were striving to treat the different ability groups in a similar manner. The climate differed also as a result of the differences in student behavior and curriculum content. The low-track classes, with one exception, were marked by distractions, frequent correction of student behavior by the teacher, verbal and physical altercations between students, name-calling, negative comments, and put-downs among the students.

All five teachers emphatically answered yes to this question in the interviews. Two of the supervisors answered yes. One of the supervisors stated that, for the most part, the answer was no, but then listed a number of ways that the social climate was different.

**Recommendations**

The classroom observations and interviews done by this researcher clearly indicated that there were wide disparities in student behavior, climate, and curriculum content which were affecting how the teachers interacted with their classes of different ability levels. There were observable differences in instructional techniques, communication styles, amount of time spent on actual instruction, participation structure, and the instructional climate in the different
ability-grouped classes. These steps should be taken by the administrators and supervisors:

1. Supervisors need to be aware of and take steps to minimize the differences that this study and many other studies in the related literature have documented. These differences include curriculum content, climate, student behavior, instructional techniques, participation structure, communication styles, and amount of time spent on actual instruction.

2. The curriculum should be revised so that all levels of classes come into contact with the “high-status knowledge” that is expected of university students.

3. The curriculum should include broad themes that all levels will cover and employ similar instructional techniques to achieve this.

4. Grouping practices should be reevaluated based on the social climate and student behavior that is evident when large numbers of low-ability students are placed in the same classes.

5. Teachers must be encouraged to clearly verbalize to all of their classes similar expectations for student behavior, homework, and student achievement.

6. Supervisors should encourage programs of peer coaching and collegial coaching to help teachers meet the demands of an increasingly diverse student population.
Suggestions for Further Study

As a result of this study, it is recommended that further investigation be pursued:

1. To replicate the study with schools in rural areas.
2. To replicate the study with schools in the city of Chicago.
3. To include a larger population of teachers so that the conclusions and generalizations are less limited in scope.
4. To replicate the study with elementary or junior high schools.
5. To replicate the study with private or parochial schools.
6. To investigate the differences in expectations for homework and outside preparation between the different ability groups.
7. To investigate schools where the same curriculum content is covered with different instructional techniques in the different ability groups.
8. To replicate the study with schools whose students come from elementary districts that have eliminated ability-grouped classes.
August 31, 1993

Phi Delta Kappa
Eighth & Union Streets, Box 789
Bloomington, IN 47402

Dear Sirs:

I am a doctoral student at Loyola University in Chicago, Illinois. My research advisor is Dr. Edward Rancic. I am requesting permission to use the TESA interaction model and teacher handbook for the observations that I plan to do for my dissertation.

The title of my proposal is "An Investigation and Description of Teacher Behavior in High- and Low-Track English Classes". I will be observing teachers and using the parts of the TESA interaction model to document the behaviors of the teachers.

If you grant permission, I will also appreciate any updated information or additional research done on TESA. I would like to begin my classroom observations in September, 1993.

Thank you for your consideration

Sincerely,

Dorothy C. Sievert
September 3, 1993

Dorothy C. Sievert

Dear Ms. Sievert:

Thank you for your letter of August 31 requesting permission to use the TESA interaction model and teacher handbook. You do not mention in your letter whether you have been trained in the TESA program. If you have, you are automatically qualified to carry out the observations you wish to include in your doctoral research. If not, I would urge you to receive this training before you embark on your field work. This would help to ensure that the reliability of your observations would meet the highest levels.

I enclose a short article on some TESA research. It is possible that the Los Angeles County Office of Education may have some additional information. The address is: Los Angeles County Education Center, Elsa Brizzi, TESA Program Director, 9300 East Imperial Highway, Room 246, Downey, CA 90242-2890.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. My telephone number is 812/339-1156.

Sincerely,

Neville L. Robertson, Director
Center for the Dissemination of Innovative Programs

NLR/cam
Enclosure
August 31, 1993

Ms. , Principal

Dear Ms. ,

Per our conversation today, I am requesting that I be allowed to observe in an English classroom during the first semester of the upcoming school year. Your school will be one of several suburban high schools that I plan to include in my dissertation study. The study has been approved by the Loyola University Human Subjects Review Board and by my committee. I am a student at Loyola University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department working towards a Ph. D. in Supervision and Administration.

I would like to observe five lessons in a Freshman high-track English class and five lessons in a Freshman low-track English class taught by the same teacher. After the observations, I would like to conduct one short interview with the teacher. I will arrange the observation dates with the individual teacher at times convenient to him. There will be complete confidentiality of the teacher’s identity in the dissertation. It has been very difficult to find teachers who teach both levels of Freshman English, so I really appreciate your cooperation and that of the teacher.

It would be very helpful if you could mail me a school calendar so that I can arrange the dates. I will also need an identification card to enter the building.

Thank you very much for your cooperation and for allowing me to include your school in my study. Please call me at home or at work if there are any questions. I look forward to seeing you this fall.

Sincerely,

Dorothy Sievert
REFERENCES


VITA

The author, Dorothy Carlton Sievert, is the daughter of General (Retired) Paul Kendall and Helen Carlton. She was born in Albany, Georgia, on April 20, 1946.

Her elementary education and secondary education were completed in public schools in the states of California, Georgia, Virginia, and Michigan as well as the Trust Territory of Guam.

She graduated from Purdue University, with Highest Distinction, in 1968 where she received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Spanish. She also attended the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. The author received her Master of Arts in Spanish from Loyola University Chicago.

Dorothy Sievert currently serves as Social Services Dean at Willowbrook High School in the western suburbs of Chicago. She is married and has three children.
APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Dorothy C. Sievert has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

3-15-94
Date

Director's Signature