## Join the national conversation!

## USD SEADMN M2MOL <br> Word Generation - Unit 2.24

## Focus Words

tracking | aptitude | policy | components | involve

## Weekly Passage

Academic tracking means students are placed into certain classes based on their abilities. Let's say Jasmine shows an aptitude for mathematics in sixth grade. She would then be put in advanced math courses starting in seventh grade and continuing all the way through high school. But Oscar, who is in her class, starts off slowly in math so he takes a completely different and easier set of math classes. In her senior year, when Jasmine knows more math than Oscar, is this because of aptitude or experience?

The arguments for and against the tracking policy have many components. Some people think tracking is a good idea. Students can learn at their own speed. Higher track students do not have to wait for others to catch up with them. Lower track students do not have to deal with students who are faster and get impatient with them for slowing the class down.

People who oppose academic tracking point out that the tracks are decided by testing. Tests can misrepresent students' skills. The people who think tracking is unfair argue that students who do not test well end up in low-level
classes where they have fewer chances to learn. Maybe the students who score low on the test just need tutoring or a little more time to learn the same material as the high-tracked students. Tracking opponents complain that schools do not involve themselves in helping lower-tracked students learn because they are busy getting higher-tracked students ready for college.

What do you think about this? Is this practice fair? Do kids like Oscar miss out on a better education because they are put into a low track?

## TEACHER

Reading Comprehension/Discussion Questions:

- What is academic tracking?
- What is the usual way schools track or place students into aptitude or "ability groups"?
- Why do some teachers and students feel that tracking can benefit some students?
- What groups of students might be hurt through the tracking system?
- Is there a tracking policy at your school?

| Unit 2.24 Should middle and high schools use acad tracking? Focus Word Chart |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Word | Meaning | Forms |  |  |
|  |  | Inflectional | Basic Word Classes | Prefixes/ Suffixes |
| track | (v.) - to group by ability | trackings (pl.) | track (v.) | untracked <br> trackable <br> tracker |
| aptitude | (n.) - ability, ease of learning | aptitudes | apt | aptitudinal aptitudinally ineptitude |
| policy | (n.) - course of action | policies |  |  |
| components | (n.) - parts | components (pl.) |  | componential |
| involve | (v.) - to engage | involves involved involving |  | uninvolved involvement involver |

## Unit 2.24 -

## Should middle and high schools use academic tracking? <br> Problem of the Week

Hughes Middle School follows a policy of academic tracking. The school has advanced math classes for students who have an aptitude for math. Choosing students for this program involves giving all students a math test with two components: calculating and critical thinking. Students must earn a total score of $80 \%$ to qualify for the advanced class.

Option 1: Julie received 95 out of 120 points on her math aptitude test. Will she qualify for the advanced math class?
A) Yes
(B) No

Option 2: On the math aptitude test, the calculating component is worth $70 \%$ of the final grade, and the critical thinking component is worth $30 \%$. If Bethany gets half of the calculating problems right and all of the critical thinking problems right, will she qualify for the advanced class? (You can assume that all problems within each of the two sections are worth the same number of points.)

Answer: No. Bethany's score is $65 \%$.

Discussion Question: Tracking involves measuring each student's aptitude, and this usually means giving a test. A policy of tracking students using a test score means that some students will miss qualifying for a higher track by just a few points. Is it fair for a student to be put into a lower track based on a few points? Is there a way to make tracking decisions more fair? What components should a fair tracking system have? Or is tracking just wrong?

Unit 2.24

## Should middle and high schools use academic tracking?

 Debating the Issue
## I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).
 Students should be tracked in school. This is the best way to make sure that students are getting the kind of instruction they need for their level.


Students should not be tracked in school. All students regardless of their level should receive the same instruction, curriculum, and materials.

Students should be tracked in school in different ways; tests should be used together with other ways of assessing a student's actual knowledge in math, science, social studies and English.

Students should not be tracked at all. Students should be given opportunities to display their academic aptitudes through the school year. There should be on-going checks to see where kids are in their learning.

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## 2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:
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#### Abstract

TEACHER Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions


## Unit 2.24 -

Should middle and high
schools use academic
tracking?
Science Activity
"I wish our school used academic tracking," sighs
Professor Seemy."Kids are so different! Gerard hates math. Keisha has the aptitude for calculus. Separate tracks would make things easier for everyone!"
"Our school has a good reason for its no-tracking policy," says Professor Kahn."Tracking involves labeling some students 'good' and others 'not-so-good.' Labels are dangerous! When teachers expect not-so-good work, they don't push their students to succeed."
"Can that be right?" Professor Seemy wonders."Let's investigate!"

## Question:

How do teacher expectations affect student performance?

## Hypothesis:

If a teacher expects good work from one group of students, and not-so-good work from another, the "good" students will score higher on a quiz.

## Materials:

- 20 students with a 3.0 GPA
- a one-day course on earthquakes, held twice
- quiz
- 1 teacher (The teacher's job has two components. He or she must teach the course on Monday, and then teach it again on Tuesday.)


## Procedure:

1. Find 20 students with a 3.0 GPA .
2. Randomly assign 10 students to take the earthquakes course on Monday and the other 10 to take it on Tuesday.
3. Tell the teacher that the Monday students are "good" students, and the Tuesday students are "not-so-good" students.
4. Hold the course. Give the quiz.
5. Calculate the average quiz grade for each group of students.

## Data:

|  | Average Grade |
| ---: | :---: |
| Monday ("good" students) | $\mathbf{9 3 \%}$ |
| Tuesday ("not-so-good" students) | $\mathbf{7 8 \%}$ |

## Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?
Supported

## What evidence supports your conclusion?

The students that the teacher expected to be good students performed better on the quiz than the students that the teacher expected to be not-so-good students, despite the fact that they all entered the course with the same GPA and the good/not-so-good labels were randomly assigned.

How would you make this a better experiment?
Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.

## Writing Prompt

Should middle and high schools use academic tracking?

## Focus Words

tracking | aptitude | policy | components | involve Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.
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| TEACHER <br> Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic. <br> Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation books as needed. |
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