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ASPECTS OF TRACKING IN THE SCHOOLS AS A FACTOR OF RISK AND EXCLUSION OF STUDENTS

Abstract. Israel Lili, *Aspects of Tracking in the Schools as a Factor of Risk and Exclusion of Students* [Dzielenie dzieci w szkole na grupy pod względem możliwości intelektualnych jako czynnik ryzyka i wykluczenia]. Studia Edukacyjne nr 46, 2017, Poznań 2017, pp. 405-424. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 1233-6688. DOI: 10.14746/se.2017.46.26

The tracking of students in the schools is a topic that obligates social and educational reference. This is a field that exposes gaps and contradictions regarding the possibilities and intentions of parts of Israeli society. It is difficult to define who is being talked about. In addition, it is difficult to separate between or limit the reference to the single student as a real and feeling subject and the desire of the system for a child as a product of education. It is difficult to describe a general picture without forgetting the individuals in it, the students, when the relationship between the tracking, the dropping out, and the exclusion is unavoidable.

This article is an attempt to examine the argument presented in research studies that the gaps between different groups in the population derive from the policy of tracking in education from the establishment of the State of Israel until today and that this policy is intentional. The way that the school as an organization acts and the topics with which it copes can be explained in social policy and in the sociological rationale that characterizes society in Israel.

Which social and educational policy serves the tracking of students and why, despite the data and the numbers that indicate a large gap, is the topic of tracking not present in the educational discussion? I seek to assert that research in the field is insufficient and that it is necessary to place the topic on the agenda and conduct an educational discussion.

Key words: youths at-risk, tracking, exclusion, inequality in education, social structures, separation, differentiation, transcription, segregation

The feeling of the lack of equality is one of the most difficult feelings. It harms the forces that unite society. It harms the person's self-identity

Janusz Korczak

Introduction

The objective of the article is to examine the economic assumption of neoliberalism, which assumes that the happiness and successes of people can be achieved and realized through their entrepreneurial abilities in the institutional systems. How does the tracking of the students from the early grades of the school support this assumption? Tracking is associated with the field of the school structures, and this raises questions. Are these structures that reconstruct social structures or is this a policy of many years that brings up questions on the continuation of the implementation and the influences on students who are at risk and who are excluded?

This article seeks to examine the question of how much and in what way does tracking in the schools release or 'replicate' social inequality. I want to shed light on the mechanisms and expressions of tracking and how it contributes to mobility or duplicates and preserves inequality between students. The emphasis is placed on the weak in society and on students who are at risk and who are excluded.

The following up after the assumption of the sociological perspective of society's manner of functioning enables the prediction and explanation of behaviors. In Israel, there is a relationship between the student's social-economic status and learning achievements, when the percentage of difference of learning achievements explained by the student's background data is among the highest in the world.[1] Research in the sociological educational field reveals mechanisms that reproduce and preserve the inequality in the educational opportunities, which has implications on the ability of individuals to change their initial social status and their life chances.[2] In other words, the relationship between the individual's social economic status can be described as reproduced from his parents' social economic status, despite the expansion of the education system, which has the objective of including more students who belong to a low social status.[3]

Tracking is a common term in sociology and education that addresses the different social mechanisms that create or shape a track for individuals or gro-

[1] OECD, 2014, *Society at a Glance 2014: OECD Social Indicators*.

[2] C.A. Torres, A. Antikainen, *Introduction to a Sociology of Education: Old Dilemmas in a New Century?* [In:] *The International Handbook on the Sociology of Education*, Eds. C.A. Torres, A. Antikainen, Maryland 2003, p. 1-18.

[3] K. Sabag, L. Biberman-Shalev, *Education, Society, and Justice*, Prades 2014.

ups. Education tracking refers to the building of different tracks for students with different needs and abilities. The term explains what is done in the field – there is follow up of the students so as to adjust the learning to them and thus enable them to can realize their abilities so that they can be equal in society as opposed to being excluded from society.

Tracking and the Relationship with Social Inequality

The main theory is that the tracking addresses different social mechanisms that create or shape the path for individuals or groups in such a way that enables or prevents social mobility. It is argued that the policy of education in Israel, which directs students to the learning paths in secondary education and determines their future already at an early age, is a discriminatory government policy that began in the 1950s and caused Ashkenazi[4] Jews to have a high representation in the academic high schools and Mizrachi[5] Jews to have a high representation in the vocational tracks, and thus created the economic class separation. Conversely, the sociology of education emphasizes the importance of the acquisition of an education and maintains that education may be an effective mechanism for the individual's advancement on the social economic ladder.[6]

Society sees the education system to be the main instrument of social mobility. Its role is to enable change and ascent in the social hierarchy, while providing equality of opportunity in learning on the basis of meritocracy: the progression according to effort, achievements, and ability and not according to family or class affiliation as in the past (Lampert, 2013). The education system has the ability and responsibility to create a mechanism that frees the individual and allows him to change his initial status, and it also serves as a mechanism for socialization for the values of democracy.[7] Despite the aspiration and the declared policy for equality and inclusion, it appears that until today the education system is perceived as reproducing the stratified class structure. There is still separation between different strata, expressed in the creation of learning tracks, learning programs, and even learning regions that shape the differential social placement of individuals from different classes.[8] The research indicates that social stratification and the reproduction of the student's status in the school determine the student's future.[9]

[4] Ashkenazi Jews are Jews whose origin is the countries of Europe.

[5] Mizrahi Jews are Jews whose origin is the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

[6] K. Sabag, L. Biberman-Shalev, *Education, Society*.

[7] M.T. Hallinan, *Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, New York 2000.

[8] K. Sabag, L. Biberman-Shalev, *Education, Society*.

[9] H. Lampert, *Children Lacking in Value: On the Costs of Achievement-Oriented Education*, Mofet Institute, 2013.

To examine the processes of tracking in general and tracking as an exclusionary process in the school in particular, it is important to bring up the social logic that structures their action. Tracking originates in the policy and data that helped its development. Tracking is a comprehensive name for classification, division, and separation. In this context, it is important to examine whether tracks as a systemic practice for the goal of learning strengthen the inequality between groups from different class backgrounds and thus preserve their exclusion.

In the year 2007, the Compulsory Education Law until the age of eighteen was legislated, and the result was an increase in the number of students in the high school. Mizrachi Jews and many children from the poorer populations were added to the system. 'Naturally', in a society that is divided by class, there was a further need to classify and track the students and thus to preserve the class structure in Israeli society, through the support of educational policy that tracks help these students. The main argument is that tracking is related to social disconnection. Tracking is related to removal, to separation, to differentiation, which create inequality that perpetuates the gaps.[10] Conversely, the main argument of the educational policy is that the tracking is the solution for retaining the students in the education frameworks and that this solution prevents the dropping out of many students. This argument ignores the different starting points of students and additional differences. The tracking has not been examined and has not been discussed for many years, despite the data and the gaps presented in the international tests and the national tests. It is difficult to refrain from thinking about who this serves.

Tracking and Economic Aspects

The penetration of business principles accepted in the corporate world into the education system in the past decade strengthens the trends of tracking. The emphasis on competition between schools and on the measurement of outputs creates a race for achievements. A regime of monitoring the achievements incentivizes the schools to classify students into homogeneous groups and to cause the dropping out of the students with difficulties instead of investing in their advancement and accelerates the establishment of separatist schools that meticulously classify the students who enter their walls.[11]

Models in economics today analyze the school as a factory for production that has inputs and outputs. The goal of the school is to create human capital.

[10] N. Blass, N. Zussman, S. Zur, *Segregation of Students in Elementary Schools and Middle Schools*, Research Division 2014.

[11] S. Sabirsky, N. Dagan-Bozaglo, *Enough Tracking*, Echo of Education, 2011, 86, p. 61-67.

A student is perceived as an investor who is interested in maximizing his future. Students are motivated by their desire to achieve a social status in the present and not only by what is expected for them in the future. The research studies find that students direct themselves more to the accepted norm and less to the maximization of achievements and abilities.[12] These models lead the schools to the multiplicity of contents and programs, when the aim is achievements, and thus they strengthen the need for classification, separations, and additional divisions.

In the high schools in Israel there are tracks that are different from one another in the social educational profile of their students and the achievements they can expect in the education system. About 15% belong to the practical engineering track, which is selective and demanding, and the findings indicate that these students have the best chances of attaining a high school matriculation certificate. The rest of the vocational/technological tracks are attended by students come to these tracks from social groups considered weaker: girls, Arabs, and those from a poor social economic background. When the transitions of the students between the different tracks were examined, it was found that the low percentage indicates tracking, which is determined ahead of time and preserves the division of the students into tracks from the start. There are social economic influences on the classification into the different tracks, and the learning track still has significant impact on the student's chance to finish high school and to obtain a high school matriculation certificate.[13]

The suitability of students to the social structures is expressed also in the nature of the role of rewards. Like in capitalist society, when the goal is to maximize the economic profit and it is the main motive of the market forces, in the education system external rewards, like grades, become a main objective in the learning. The encouragement of values that promote competitiveness leads to alienation regarding individuals for whom this is a difficult task. In any event, the outcome is further tracking,[14] through the construction of the perception among the students who come to tracked classes that the system acts best for them, as underachievers. Researchers maintain that through the learning levels and the curriculum students learn to impose on themselves the role of 'serving power', through the implementation of practices and pedagogies that obligate students to be disciplined, to obey authority, and to avoid

[12] S. Levitt et al., *The Behavior List Goes to School. Leveraging Behavioral Economics to Improve Educational Performance*, National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper, 2012, 18185, Available on internet..

[13] K. Blank, Y. Shavit, M. Yaish, *Tracking in High School Education in Israel, Report of the Situation of the State – Society*, Economy, and Policy, 2015, p. 413-435.

[14] J. Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (2nd ed.), New Haven, CT 2005.

the expression of independent opinions.[15] These practices lead students, primarily from the low classes, to accept as obvious the hierarchical capitalist structure and to become enslaved to the accompanying ideology.[16]

Tracking as a Mechanism for the Reproduction and Preservation of Social Structures

Researchers maintain that the story of the education system in Israel is a story of group decisions, and the general direction of the processes is determined by organized groups that acted according to their understanding of their group interest, through the adoption of social and economic models. The direction to residence in a development town is the direction to a school in this town and thus created tracking that, even if it suited specifically a certain adolescent, was accompanied by a general framework of coercion. According to Kimmerling (2001), the tracking of different social populations did not pertain only to the scholastic achievements but also to their social images and their class and ethnic affiliation. Since the 1950s, the direction to marginal learning tracks, residences, and occupations, even if not intentional, has preserved the social structures.

Researchers indicate the tracking as a mechanism that preserves social structures in the education system and thus perpetuates the gaps between classes and groups in the education system in Israel. The research reflects the reality that indicates that as the subject is perceived as more important it is tracked more, for instance, the subject of mathematics. Hence, children who belong to the families who are struggling for survival and subsistence will be in classes of children with difficulties. In parallel, the academic tracks in the high schools include also means of filtering and tracks selected for the children of the elite.[17] The schools serve the interests of a capitalist system in modern society, or in other words, they reproduce the values and personality characteristics required in this society. While in society there are structures of separation, segregation, and inequality, in schools they are called tracking.[18] The curricula reproduce the power relations between groups that act in ca-

[15] S. Davies, N. Guppy, *The Schooled Society*, New York 2010.

[16] S. Sabirsky, N. Dagan-Bozaglo, *Enough Tracking*, p. 61-67.

[17] M. Motola, D. Mittleberg, M. Razer, *Mechanisms in the School that Create, Preserve, Increase, and Resolve Social Exclusion*, Intermediate Report, 146, Oranim College Research Department, 2014.

[18] A. Addi-Raccah, Y. Greenstein, H. Bahak, *Trends of Differentiation or Integration in the Residential Environment on the Basis of the Social Economic Positioning of the Students in the School*, Submitted to the Staff of Experts on the Topic of Inequality and Education, The Israeli National Academy of the Sciences 2015.

pitalist society through practices that emphasize competitiveness and achievements, individuality, and the partial inculcation of knowledge in the low tracks.

Sociologists do not leave room for the argument that this process occurred by chance but see the tracking of the children in the periphery communities and development towns to be a clear and intentional position. Students from different sectors and different social groups are placed into different learning tracks, learn curricula different in content and in quality, and accordingly also reach different end points. In their researches they seek to emphasize that this is a political-social policy in Israel from the beginning of the 1960s and the normative mode of action of the education system is to constantly classify the students, so as to cultivate the select minority in the higher groping.[19]

Another argument of the sociologists is that for many years the education system has been built on in-depth tracking, on the existence of separate and unequal education systems, and on segregative processes as they have existed in Israel from the first years of the state. The high schools are divided until today into two categories: academic and vocational. The academic schools have a high level of studies and are selective and adopt a strict policy in the acceptance of the students according to achievements. Therefore, they classify their students into classes based on achievements and on the chances of future success. Vocational education was intended for students who were considered unsuitable for academic studies on the basis of their previous achievements. Most of the children of immigrants from the countries of the Middle East who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s were found unsuited and were directed to the vocational schools, where the scholastic demands were relatively low. The expansion of the tracking to vocational education was justified as being commensurate with the demands of the economy that was developing in the first years of the state. Thus, the vocational schools served the economic social policy, providing a skilled workforce for industry and an opportunity for the acquisition of education for the population that was considered to be weak and enabling the academic schools to select students and adhere to the values of 'excellence' they supported (Goodman & Mizrachi, 2013). From the 1990s, the name of these learning tracks was changed from 'vocational' to 'technological', in the attempt to attribute to them prestige. However, the trend of channeling that includes classification and separations did not change.[20]

It is hard on this topic to speak about facts and policy; the truth is complicated. One of the examples was the establishment of the middle school,

[19] S. Sabirsky, N. Dagan-Bozaglo, *Enough Tracking*, p. 61-67.

[20] N. Blass, N. Zussman, S. Zur, *Segregation of Students.*

which fundamentally was supposed to create equality and integration and to prevent the economic and class status separation, but this was preserved in the high representation in the learning tracks in it. Despite the declarations of the education system of integration, the tracking and separations were retained. The sociologist Molcho[21] objected to this argument and explained that the separation and classification are a product of the desire to provide a solution that would suit the students and there was no intentional tracking. This argument does not meet the test of reality, since even when the budgets were increased and reforms to make changes were implemented, the tracking continued to be the practice of a systemic structure that preserves separations and classification according to achievements until today.

Tracking Mechanisms in the Education System

The tracking of students was performed in the past and is performed today according to the same practices. The main tenet is the classification of students into tracks according to achievements. There is a division into higher, preferred, prestigious tracks and into other tracks that collect students at risk and students who are excluded. The difference between the learners is one of the explanations of the need for tracks. The difference is an inseparable part of the nature of education, and it may be expressed in different dimensions: cognitive ability, learning style, personal attributes, emotional maturity, and social background, and thus creates social heterogeneity. While some see a difference between the students to be an educational value that contributes to learning and constitutes an opportunity for advancement, others see it to be a problem to be reduced.[22]

Tracking in the education system has a number of practices and channels: the division of all the students into classes according to levels, academic and vocational programs, classes for excellent students and classes for students with difficulties, and groups according to achievements. Tracking is performed also through the transfer of the student to smaller classes, dropping to a lower level, groupings in which the level of the material learned is different. The tracked structure gives to the teaching staffs a 'recipe' that became a norm that manages the learning. This 'recipe' creates and furthers structural gaps that were known beforehand between the different groups of students, gaps that do not lessen despite the tracking.

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[21] A. Molcho, *The Argument of Tracking: A Test Case in Critical Sociology*, 2011, p. 29-54.

[22] M. Dressler, *Individualized Teaching as an Opportunity to Provide a Response to the Differences of Learners*, Eureka, 2010, p. 39-47.

Tracks receive names. The name of the track constitutes a label of its own. Tremendous resources are directed to the students who learn higher units in mathematics, at the expense of the weaker students. Thus the gap is increased. The excellent students have a way open to the future, to profitable and esteemed professions. The weaker students do not receive what they need. The compartmentalization of knowledge is expressed in the bestowing of distinct prestige to different areas of knowledge while classifying the students regarding their degree of exposure to areas of knowledge with high prestige according to their achievements.[23]

The Ministry of Education prohibits the classification of the students in the acceptance to the elementary schools as well as the implementation of separation, tracking, and grouping in elementary education and limits them in secondary education.[24] In actuality, this is not the case. Despite this prohibition, separating and differentiating mechanisms were found beginning in the first grade, when instead of levels the groups are given names or colors and every student knows whether he belongs to the weak group or the strong group.[25] In the transition to the middle school there are classification tests that divide the students into levels in the core subjects. From the seventh grade, the Ministry of Education permits groupings in mathematics and in English, but there must be the creation of conditions that enable the mobility of the students and their rise from level to level.[26] In reality, this division establishes the status of the students in the classifying groups and has basis in the school discourse, primarily expressions and sentences that mean another classification or dropping down to a lower group, while a conversation on the reduction of gaps and a rise to a higher level is less common.

Blass[27] presents data on a system that preserves the scholastic gaps between students from low economic groups and their classmates from established families. The education system declares the struggle against segregation and simultaneously ignores the existence of mechanisms of separation, tracking, and ability grouping, which serve the competition and achievements in the integrative schools. These mechanisms of separation place students into homerooms according to their social economic background or according to their learning achievements, although the curriculum is supposed to be uniform for all.[28]

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[23] M. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (3rd ed.), London 2004.

[24] Ministry of Education, Director General's Circular, 2010; Ministry of Education, Director General's Circular, 2014.

[25] N. Blass, N. Zussman, S. Zur, *Segregation of Students in Elementary Schools.*

[26] Ministry of Education, Director General's Circular 54/8, 1994.

[27] N. Blass, *Inequality in Education in Israel*.

[28] N. Lipstat, H. Glickman, *Equality of Opportunities in Education in the Mirror of National Tests: A Selection of Data from Longitudinal Research in the Fields of English and Mathematics*, The National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education (RAMA), 2014.

The research of Goodman and Mizrachi[29] revealed the stratified and tracking dimension of the educational work. The research found that on the low levels, the teachers were providers of information and authoritarian and the students sat in rows and were passive, while in the prestigious classes, there was a discussion in a circle, the students were active, and they told about their emotions. The toolkit the students acquired was different. The focus on the techniques of decision making and the solution of moral dilemmas among students from a high social-economic status is commensurate with the assertion of Lareau[30] on the work of cultivation used among educators for children from a high social-economic status. In his opinion, this cultivation work fills an important role in the training of these children to become citizens with opinion, social abilities, and social skills that will allow them to participate actively in society. In contrast, children from a low-moderate social-economic status primarily are recipients of the concern for the satisfaction of their basic emotional and physical needs. Their emotional world is shaped from the reliance on the hierarchies of symbols and on permanent social roles in a way that does not encourage musing about, disputing, or negotiating the social order. The distinct use of learning techniques in the prestigious classes and in the lower classes expresses and re-establishes a constellation of positions that is ethnic and class-bound.[31]

The grouping is one of the channels of tracking of the different education systems in the world that sought to cope with the heterogeneous classes through the transfer of students who for different reasons do not meet the normative criteria.[32] Grouping addresses the way in which students are placed into groups on the basis of their abilities, so that homogenous groups are created. Grouping can be a program that includes all the subjects in the school for certain students, as implemented in academic high schools (such as the classes of the MABAR, OMETZ, and LEV programs[33], for example). Conversely, it can be specific to a certain subject, so that the student will learn at different levels in different subjects. A main consideration in the creation of the groupings is related to the assumption according to which the learning of a group of

[29] Y. Goodman, N. Mizrachi, *National Memory and Civilian Tracking: Ethnic-Class Differences in the Processes of Memory in High Schools in Israel*, [in:] *Practice of Difference in the Field of Education in Israel: A Look from Above*, Eds. Y. Yonah, N. Mizrachi, Y. Feniger, 2013, p. 108-135.

[30] A. Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, Berkeley 2003.

[31] Y. Goodman, N. Mizrachi, *National Memory and Civilian Tracking*, p. 108-135.

[32] S. Sabirsky, N. Dagan-Bozaglo N., *Enough Tracking*, p. 61-67.

[33] These are programs for students who do not succeed in learning. These are learning programs and tracks, in which there is increased help and in which the students learn in small groups and with a limited curriculum. In some of these programs, the students will finish with a partial high school matriculation certificate (MABAR) and in other programs the students will complete twelve years of study without a high school matriculation certificate (LEV).

students that is homogenous in terms of ability and achievements is more effective than reference to the diverse needs of a group with heterogeneous ability. While in the elementary schools the division into groups according to ability occurs for the most part in the classes, when the students are divided into small groups by achievement levels, in the middle school and the high school the use of groupings between classes is common.[34]

The division according to the positive or negative results of the groupings addresses primarily the middle school and the high school. In a longitudinal research study that examined the influences of the learning in an ability group, the results supported the criticism against the groupings that they lead to negative psychosocial implications for students in the low groupings while they are beneficial for the students in the high ability group. These implications may influence the students' values, interest, goals, and behaviors as well as their self and academic perception. A negative influence was found of the placement in the low groupings on the students' mental wellbeing. It was found that students with low levels of mental wellbeing and self and academic perception are at risk for depressive responses, low grades, dropping out of the school, and delinquency, while students in the high grouping may experience the school as a positive environment since their belonging to a higher grouping gives them social status. Students in the low grouping may suffer from the loss of social status, low scholastic expectations, and low motivation, to the point of the development of negative attitudes towards the school, disruptive behaviors, disconnection, and even dropping out of the learning process.[35] Beyond the emotional and social implications of the division into groupings, it was asserted that this way may cause the increase of the gap in achievements, since the teaching that the students in the lower ability groups receive is not equivalent to the teaching that the students in the higher ability groups receive.[36] The research findings about what happens in the low groupings confirm what every student in the third grouping can tell: in the third grouping they learn very little, they learn it very slowly, and they are very disruptive. It is very difficult to go up a grouping, and as the stay in the third grouping is longer, the chance of leaving it is lower.[37] The gap in the curriculum reduces the students' ability to shift between groupings, although the

[34] Belfi et al., *The Effect of Class Composition by Gender and Ability on Secondary School Students' School Well-Being and Academic Self-Concept: A Literature Review*, Educational Research Review, 2012, 7, p. 62-74.

[35] J. Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (2nd ed.), New Haven, CT 2005.

[36] L. Teller, *Why Groupings? What Are the Goals of the Method of Grouping and What It Truly Achieves*, Society: Socialist Journal for Issues of Society, Economy, Politics, and Culture, 2003, 9, p. 9-11.

[37] D. Tobin, *Improvement of Achievements in the Upper Schools: Management Practices, Structures, and Processes, Research Report*, Ben Gurion University, 2012.

primary goal of the groupings is to promote the level of the students' achievements. It was found that as the schools more frequently employ groupings of the students in quality groups in the different subjects and as the schools more frequently transfer to other schools the students who have poor achievements or who have behavioral problems or learning disabilities, the level of achievements of the entire system declines.[38]

These problems become stronger in light of the central place of the groupings in the tracking processes. At the end of the middle school, there is classification into many diverse tracks – prestigious high school matriculation examination certification tracks and less prestigious ones (according to the prestige of the subjects taught in these tracks), tracks of partial high school matriculation examination certification, and vocational tracks without the high school matriculation examination certification. In essence, at this stage the value of the certificate that the student will acquire at the end of twelve years of study is determined, as are the student's possibilities for higher education and future employment. The tracking creates a circle of low expectations that lead to failure, the low expectations of the teachers on the part of the principals and supervisors and the low expectations of the teachers of themselves, the low expectations of the students on the part of the teachers, the low self-image of students, the low image of the students in the teachers' opinion, and a tradition of failure.[39]

A research study conducted by Tobin[40] found that the stage of tracking includes the events that lead every student to choose the study program suited to him. However, students with learning difficulties and low achievements are tracked to a track without the possibility of the choice of a learning program. This is determined for them ahead of time. These tracks are known by names such as MABAR (regular high school matriculation examination certification), ETGAR, LEV (towards the high school matriculation examination certification), HAZLACHA, and OMETZ (believing in the self, willing to put forth effort, expecting achievements). All of these programs act according to the same principles of small classes, reinforcement, and personal work. A learning track is determined for every student at the end of the ninth grade by the educational staff on the basis of achievements, behavior, and motivation. However, there is also systemic-organizational thinking on the learning tracks as opposed to the identified needs of the community that goes to the school. Thus, in weak communities there are fewer academic classes, more MABAR classes, and more reinforcement classes. Again the reality dictates the gaps and the inequality that influences the student's future achievements.

[38] L. Teller, *Why Groupings?* p. 9-11.
[39] S. Sabirsky, N. Dagan-Bozaglo, *Enough Tracking*, p. 61-67.
[40] D. Tobin, *Improvement of Achievements in the Upper Schools*.

When a student is interested in moving a learning group, the 'gatekeepers' of tracking enter the picture; this is a main figure (for instance, the pedagogical coordinator or a senior counselor) who is in charge of the examination of the process of the re-tracking and enables, or for the most part does not enable, it to happen.

The conceptualizations and the language of educators also indicate the tracking mechanisms and the extent to which they are inherent in and built into the system. The tracking conceptualizations became the daily reality "he won't be here if he does not learn", "his parents will see to him and not me", "the student should be removed, his place is not here". The conceptualization and the language create and preserve the exclusionary mechanisms. These students are placed in classes with others who are similar to them and the question is asked about their chances when they are with others who are similar to them, when these are classes with discipline difficulties, anxieties, learning disabilities, and attention disorders. They are students who are characterized by continuous failure, frustration, and social exclusion.

Tracking as Inequality and Exclusion

A main argument of researchers is that the separation into scholastic tracks largely determines the life tracks and relies on class considerations, and not educational ones, and that there is a strong relationship of poverty and distress with ignorance and extreme opinions that create students with social disconnection. For the most part, the academic schools enjoy prestige and a high status, facts that are important to the school principals and the heads of the local governments.[41] Most of these schools are located geographically in main cities, in well-established neighborhoods, and most of the students are of the same ethnic group. In contrast, vocational high schools were found to suit the students (from another ethnic group) where the percentages of success and achievements in the tests were low.[42] This assertion continues to exist year after year, without dispute and without further thought.

A research study of the Bank of Israel,[43] which examined the contribution of a vocational high school education versus an academic high school education to the education and success in the job market, shows that vocational education leads to an insignificant career but helps the reduction of the dropping out from the high school, and this is its main target. Vocational educa-

[41] K. Blank, Y. Shavit, M. Yaish, *Tracking in High School Education in Israel*, p. 413-435.

[42] S. Sabirsky, N. Dagan-Bozaglo, *Inequality and Weak Control: A Picture of the Situation of Education in Israel*, Tel Aviv 2009.

[43] N. Zussman, S. Zur, *The Contribution of Vocational High School*.

tion creates tracking, while academic education gives a 'uniform' framework and an equal opportunity for all. The arguments are that in vocational education there is greater tracking and with it labeling and exclusion that lead to far inferior scholastic achievements and the lack of basic skills required for the person in modern society, and they reach post-high school education to a significantly less extent. Consequently, the earning ability of the graduates of vocational education is detrimentally influenced, in comparison to that of the graduates of the academic high school, and the inequality in the distribution of the incomes is increased.[44]

Some researchers see the mechanism of tracking to be a factor that leads to inequality in the future opportunities in education and employment. Oakes[45] found that as tracking is used at young ages, the chances for the continuation of higher studies lessen, as does the income from the job. The researchers attribute the negative results of vocational education to a number of factors, when the prominent factors are the lack of appropriate academic preparation and the negative image that stuck to students in these tracks, as well as the lack of mobility between tracks. Their argument is that these children are distanced from the high school matriculation certificate and from the possibility of the acquisition of a higher education.[46] In contrast, the assertion is that vocational education provides students with a way that enables them to reduce the chance of unemployment and future poverty.[47] These arguments raise thoughts about the preservation and reproduction of their social status and the lack of ability that characterizes them as a part of the coping with their exclusion in society in the future.

The collection of data on high schools in Israel and the achievements of the students, which was published in the year 2016,[48] came for the first time with additional data about what is done in the high schools, the climate, the percentages of violence, the social involvement, and the attitudes of teachers towards them, perhaps in the attempt to reduce the meaning of the low eligibility for the students and for the economy and Israeli society. It is necessary to ask the question whether there is a relationship between things, so as to show that the situation of the high school matriculation certificates is influenced by the situation of behavior that that Ministry of Education rejects, as well as the question regarding the shift of the focus to the students' difficulties regardless of the system. The reports of the students themselves delineate

[44] Ibidem.

[45] J. Oakes, *Keeping Track*.

[46] N. Zussman, S. Zur, *The Contribution of Vocational High School*.

[47] K. Blank, Y. Shavit, M. Yaish, *Tracking in High School Education in Israel*, p. 413-435.

[48] RAMA – The National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education, *Students in Vocational Schools, Characteristics, Attitudes, and Scholastic Achievements*, Ministry of Education 2016.

a picture of severe violence and lack of closeness and caring of the teachers towards them.[49]

Researchers maintain that tracked students whose basic human needs are ignored by the school, when for a long time the students do not have a significant figure who will give them attention, when there is no reference to their opinions and needs, and when the students feel they are objects of one-sided actions, become unsuccessful and alienated and their chances of dropping out from the school are great.[50] They are characterized by the lack of commitment to the school, the lack of motivation to attain achievements, failure in and poor achievements in the studies, all of which increase their chances of developing aggressive behavior and becoming students at-risk.[51]

The declared goal of the tracking is reflected also in the policy of inclusion that the Ministry of Education set as the top priority in 2012. "Every student will receive according to his ability the help that he needs." This approach intends to create mobility instead of tracking, the inclusion of students instead of their exclusion. The only findings that exist are from the data of the high school matriculation examinations and scores. These tell that there are no changes. If we examine before and after the inclusion, it appears that there is no change that indicates greater success. The trend of tracking continues. Even when the policy is changed and the inclusion of the students is declared to be a main goal, it is possible to see that the existing practices of classification and tracking and the assignment of the responsibility to the children preserve their exclusion in the system and later in society.[52]

A longitudinal research study conducted over eleven years examined the long-term results among students who were identified in the first grade as having learning and behavior difficulties. It was found that in the twelfth grade these students were at risk of placement in special education, use of mental health services, poor scholastic achievements (in mathematics and in reading), and dropping out from the school. Different emotional and social problems were found to be related to failure in the scholastic realm, to learning difficulties, and to difficulties with adjustment to the school framework.[53] Over the

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[49] P. Moore, A. Luriah, *The Power of the Educational Counselor, The School as a Promoting Educational Environment*, Jerusalem 2010, p. 19-52.

[50] P. Moore, Y. Mandelson, *To Speak with Adolescents at Risk: The Psychosocial Educational Perception*, Jerusalem 2006.

[51] D. Ben-Rabi et al., *Research Report: The Implicit Dropping out in Israel: Re-examination of Disconnection among School Students*, Jerusalem 2014.

[52] M. Motola, D. Mittleberg, M. Razer, *Mechanisms in the School that Create, Preserve, Increase, and Resolve Social Exclusion*, Oranim College Research Department, 2014.

[53] M. Cohen-Navot, A. Avadya, *The 'Individual's Wellbeing' Program in the Elementary Schools – Evaluation of the Intervention for the Promotion of the Teachers' Work with Students at Risk*, Jerusalem 2012.

years, in the school the perception was built in the student that classification and tracking are the best solution for him, that in the framework into which the student was tracked, the conditions are better for him. A glass ceiling is built that cannot be shattered. The main responsibility is on the student, and he knows that the lack of success results in further exclusion to an even more tracked school.

Tracked students experience social exclusion and feel that they do not belong, that they are not a part of society. This influences their scholastic achievements and sometimes duplicates the experience of their parents in the school. Research studies illustrate the relationship between the learning environment and the functioning of the learners in it. When a student is found in a learning environment with others similar to him, students with difficulties in different areas, their functioning is influenced by this, and the experience of their exclusion is strengthened. These youths suffer from a variety of problems and difficulties that threaten their current and future adjustment. Schonert-Reichel[54] asserts that it is necessary to continue to research students who have a variety of difficulties, weak students who are not accustomed to conceptualize or to report their emotions and difficulties, students who are accustomed to silence or to help that is generally further suffering for them and additional exclusion. Students at-risk are not aware for the most part that they have a voice. A pluralistic approach of difference among children who are different in gender, color, culture, social economic status, and abilities is necessary, and we should recognize these aspects in their lives, so as to create a process that will encourage them to make their voice heard, to empower the voice of individuals, the students, and to influence the general picture, which acts on them with inequality and exclusion.

Conclusion

There is nothing new in the discussion and arguments voiced on the topic of the tracking of the students since the establishment of the education system for all. Most research studies and arguments are sociological, maintaining the existence of social structures that are preserved and reproduced in the education system. The explanations are economic and social, and the conceptualization is characterized by segregation and separations, because of constraints and difficulties that characterized the establishment and formation of society and the education system, which come to represent and preserve the interests

[54] K.A. Schonert-Reichel, *Children and Youth at Risk: Some Conceptual Considerations. Paper prepared for the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda Symposium*, Children and Youth at Risk, 2000, p. 1-14.

of social groups. Thus we find for the situation economic, educational, ideological, and other explanations.

The method of classification and grouping is not a mistake of the system, exactly like the fact that fewer than half of the students in Israel obtain the high school matriculation certificate is not a failure of the system. The story of the education system is filled with programs and reforms with characteristics similar to those of the method of grouping – vocational education, 'cultivation policy', comprehensive schools – and they all were created with the goal to reduce gaps and especially to help the students. They all failed, and the gaps remained. The education system, apparently, does not aspire to truly reduce the gaps and does not attempt to bring all the students to achievements of value to their future. The data and the scarcity of research on the topic indicate the indisputable continuation of the existence of classifications, separations, and tracking today. The existence of critical discourse and discussion seeking to re-examine their necessity and role is not apparent.

After a century of research on tracking and ability grouping, one might expect to see a definitive answer to the question of how best to organize students for instruction. Yet the dilemma persists, because the goals of commonality and differentiation lie in uneasy proximity to one another, because every approach has disadvantages as well as advantages, and because the consequences of different solutions vary by context. Research in the last decade has made important progress, however, by focusing on the instruction provided to students assigned to classes in different ways. Ultimately, how students are arranged matters less than the instruction they encounter.

It can be asserted that in Israel the institutional classification into graduated and differentiated homogeneous frameworks (grouping, learning track) is the variable that most influences the aspirations for and acquisition of education as well as the future occupational status. Children from populations at-risk (because of poverty, migration and immigration, and residence in the periphery of the country) experience the risk that is reproduced in the schools. Classification and tracking are structures that preserve and strengthen the risk and the social exclusion of these children and thus preserve the circle of risk and social exclusion. The exclusion is reproduced and preserved from society to education. The research and the data indicate that the tracking, the separations, and the classification express and preserve the inequality among the students. In Israel there is no mobility among the groupings. The tracking prevents mobility and preserves the social stratification and the neoliberal economic structures. Tracking has long-term practices and mechanisms that are retained in the education system at all ages.

It is therefore desirable and necessary to listen to the students themselves and to bring the topic up for discussion and research from the students' per-

spective. It is necessary to reach the voices that are silent or that tell their pain through their behavior – these are the voices of the tracked students, who are defined as students at-risk and who sometimes are at-risk of implicit dropping out from the education system. The belief is that 'listening to their voices' is an appropriate human and ethical step that will facilitate the development of these students as equal, deserving, autonomous, and responsible partners.

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