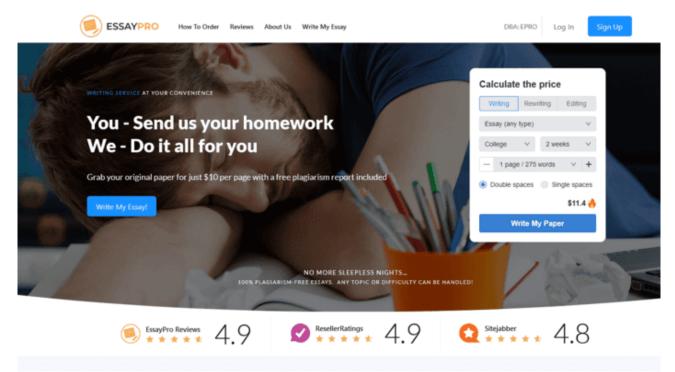
Racism in Tracking



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Racism in Tracking

Ideally, the education system in the United States aims to serve as the great equalizer in the constant struggle to counter decades and centuries of historical oppression against those of non-European descent. The ideology of education as a great equalizer purports a pedagogy as a starting point for those oppressed and separated by such forces as race and class to have access to a quality education, and hence an equal chance at all the US has to offer. It attempts to bring children from disparate realms in a place that serves them all equitably. This ideal constantly challenges the broader values of equality, liberty and democracy considered to be at the core of American ideology. In interpreting this conception, two questions are indirectly answered by examining our educational practices: Does equality in education simply foresee that all students are treated the same, despite their different needs? Or, does it intend to challenge and rectify past inequalities for a truly equitable educational system?

The ideology of education as the great equalizer rests on several assumptions. The first, as stated by bell <u>hooks</u>, is the idea that, "To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn" (hooks, p.13, 1994). hooks expresses well the

understated notion that, education as a democratic practice, available for all, is based on the assumption that all children, all people, are capable of learning. Another assumption is that children have different needs, and at its best, aims to provide resources according to need. Most importantly, <u>naming</u> this ideology "the great equalizer" in itself assumes that education has the potential to be the key force to <u>counter</u> inequality in society. Though a powerful assumption to make, it can fail to acknowledge the need to reconstruct all other institutions affecting children.

The assumptions that everyone can learn, and that schools have the potential to transform a country with a tradition of hatred and an unequal distribution of wealth, extend from the vision of education as a democratic practice where there is "a struggle for both change and the freedom to change" (Irwin, p. 51, 1991). The change is about transforming an exclusive, often oppressive and disempowering system into a more inclusive, equal, and equitable one that is accessible to children from ...

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... ike democracy, is a process, and not an end in itself.

In my view, system-wide, large-scale reform is needed to achieve the goal of "getting all young people as close as possible to their upper limits of learning potentialities" (Perrone, p. 15, 1991). This is crucial to ensure change because "trying to transform schools within the existing structure is a contradictory process" (Murphy, p. 38, 1991). The first step is to involve the traditionally voiceless at all decision-making levels to best determine what the needs of the least privileged are, if we are truly committed to providing opportunities that respond to children's needs. I specify, "opportunities" through funding based on my assumption and belief that money can improve education through attracting and keeping good teachers, reducing class sizes, establishing programs to respond to different needs, and maintaining healthy facilities and quality resources. Equitable funding, where all children have the chance to receive a high-quality education, is the first step towards education acting as the great equalizer in a country where oppression limits, dehumanizes, and disempowers in virtually every other life realm.

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