

EPE 773: Prompts for Assignment 2

Please note that the prompts below are intended to provoke your thinking and writing. You do not need to respond to all of the questions within each prompt. Try to keep your piece focused on making one overall argument.

1. Some of our readings and discussions have focused on the concepts of curricular differentiation and tracking. Curricular differentiation is simply the practice of structuring the curriculum (within or between courses) around the specific needs of different students. Tracking, on the other hand, occurs when students' course-taking patterns in one subject are strongly correlated with their course-taking patterns in other subjects. Most high schools in the United States are in a state of what Karolyn Tyson calls "laissez-faire tracking." That is, unlike the rigid tracks of 20th century high schools, today's system allows students to (at least ostensibly) enroll in courses across the spectrum of their school's course catalog. In this sense, patterns of course-taking are no longer determined by curricular tracks; these patterns create the tracks. Despite this change, researchers consistently find racialized, classed, and gendered hierarchies in the patterns of students' course-taking, and these patterns are known to have a detrimental impact on the educational opportunities of disadvantaged students.

Does tracking necessarily have to result in these inequitable outcomes? Does differentiating the curriculum automatically pave the way for social inequalities to be replicated within the education system? If not, then why do you think researchers consistently observe racial and class hierarchies in patterns of tracking and course-taking? If you believe tracking does imply inequality, then do you think de-tracking will necessarily dissolve these racial and class hierarchies within schools? Or do you think that these hierarchies will always find their way into the education system so long as economic, cultural, and social forms of inequality exist?

2. We have spent a significant amount of time discussing the ways that parents utilize their economic, cultural, and social resources to transmit advantages to their children. Assuming that it is not feasible for educators to change parents' education levels or their childrearing practices, what are some of the strategies teachers can use to disrupt the cycle of reproducing inequalities related to social class and/or race? Is it possible to change what counts as cultural capital in schools? Can teachers help disadvantaged students and parents forge social ties to individuals with institutional power? Should they? How would these strategies work and what challenges would you expect to encounter along the way?
3. Is de facto gender segregation in secondary coursetaking, undergraduate choice of major, and occupations a problem? If so, is the problem the mere difference or is there something unfair with how the differences arise? If not, is it because you perceive these differences to emerge in a fair way? Do the differences reflect a natural state of things that cannot be changed? Does Bradley's article provide any insights into this issue?

Here are some general guidelines to consider as you construct your position:

Initial Thesis (~800 words)

1. Develop a coherent thesis argument (can consist of multiple parts)
 - Introduce the topic and clearly state your position on the matter
 - Work through the details/components of your position
 - Can be done analytically by breaking down the position into constituent pieces and putting it all back together
 - Or you can focus on the interrelationships between the components – in this case the whole does not equal the sum of the parts – it is something entirely different
2. Engage your argument with existing thought (e.g., course material)
3. Aim to be persuasive, not misleading
 - To do so requires that you consider your opposition in a thoughtful way
 - Try to anticipate what the best possible argument would be against your stance

Antithesis Response (~500 – 800 words)

1. Begin by acknowledging the insights of your interlocutor
 - Be curious. What is the good sense in their argument?
 - Illustrate that you understand their position.
2. Note limitations with respect
 - You can be direct, but avoid condescension at all costs.
 - What is another way to think about the topic that contrasts with the original position?
3. Anticipate and acknowledge your own limitations

Synthesis (~500 – 800 words)

1. Acknowledge the insights of the thesis and antithesis
2. Note limitations in the antithesis
3. Try to identify possible areas of common ground
4. Advance a new thesis that reconciles the tension in the thesis/antithesis
5. Try to anticipate limitations of your new thesis