

# **Educational stratification in contemporary societies: Selection, sorting and detracking features, processes and outcomes**

*Sociology of Education Research Network  
European Sociological Association  
Midterm Conference 2010*

In cooperation with the Department of Sociology  
Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens, Greece  
**30 September – 1 October 2010**

## **Call for Papers**

In industrialized societies today, education is related more closely to labour as schools play a central role in the process of providing training, but also selecting, sorting and allocating people to jobs. During the twentieth century in Europe and the United States, the expansion of schooling was closely connected to the fundamental changes in the occupational structure and the increasing incentives for the investment in education. Obtaining higher degrees became the way to get the better jobs in society and one of the goals of mass education became the awarding of credentials that would help people to get work. These educational credentials replace the stratifying role family resources or social background once played.

As part of selection and sorting processes, in many countries around the world there has been a long tradition of educational stratification that relies among other things on grouping students according to their ability level at learning. It is assumed that it is easier and far more efficient to teach a group of students that is fairly homogeneous in terms of ability, so that teachers do not have to worry about losing the slowest learners or boring the fastest ones. In addition it is claimed that, by grouping students, education can be tailored to be most beneficial for students with different labour market trajectories. Students are offered distinctive, internally coherent programs of study and training congruent with their academic interests and competencies and fitted to their anticipated educational and vocational needs.

In secondary education, students' ability grouping at learning is organised in a myriad of ways. Some of them such as 'tracking' or 'streaming' refer to a situation in which students are taught an entirely different curriculum depending on their ability group, while 'setting' or 'banding' refer to a situation in which students are taught the same curriculum but differentiated for specific subjects in different ability groups. In each country, the secondary educational system is characterised by a history of introducing structures that abolish or re-introduce diverse systems of ability grouping. From the second half of the twentieth century on, and especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, concerns about the inequality following from selective tracking systems led to "detracking" and the creation of comprehensive educational systems. However, in the 1990s, in part due to concerns about 'raising attainment', social policy makers and educationalist implemented and emphasised the importance of selecting students and allocate them in different ability groups.

The aim of this conference is to bring together and discuss both theoretical development as well as results of empirical research dealing with different aspects of stratification in education. Subjects that could be addressed, but by no means limited to, refer to:

- ❖ social context of educational stratification and the role of education as a sorting and selection system
- ❖ different stratifying criteria in different educational systems
- ❖ comparison between different systems of ability grouping
- ❖ advantages and disadvantages of ability grouping

- ❖ outcome of ability grouping at school level (e.g. for teachers and pupils) but also broader connotations
- ❖ issues related to the role of vocational training in educational stratification.
- ❖ aspects of equality of opportunity and meritocracy, and
- ❖ relation of educational stratification to social stratification

We welcome paper proposals as well as session proposals, and empirical research as well as theoretical discussions. We particularly encourage presentations and discussions of research projects that examine issues and aspects of educational stratification from less taken-for-granted perspectives.

### **Scientific Committee:**

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### **Key Dates:**

**March 31, 2010:** abstract submission (500 words)

**May 15, 2010:** notice of acceptance

**June 14, 2010:** Early Registration

**June 30, 2010:** Final Registration deadline

(attention: number of participants is limited)

**September 30 -1 October 2010:** Midterm conference in Athens, Greece.

**Conference Fee\*:** 100 Euro (early registration); 150 Euro (late registration)

(**Note:** organising committee offers 10 places with a reduced fee for Ph.D students with none or very limited institutional financial aid).

\*The fee includes: conference materials, coffee/tea, lunches, and (1) conference dinner.

### **Send abstracts and requests for information to:**

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### **City guide:**

<http://athens.touristic.gr>

### **For a regular update, please visit:**

-Sociology of education Research Network site ([www.soern-esa.ning.com](http://www.soern-esa.ning.com))

-ESA website ([www.europeansociology.org](http://www.europeansociology.org))