De-streaming in the TDSB:

Creating a level playing field?

By

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Teaching
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Abstract

Previous research studies demonstrate that lower-achieving students fare better in a de-streamed learning environment, whereas higher achieving students are not significantly impacted. And yet, in the province of Ontario, the widespread practice of academic streaming continues. This study is concerned with an initiative in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) that is refraining from streaming grade 9 and 10 students by ability level. This qualitative research investigates the initiative’s outcome through the perspective of three in-service teachers currently teaching in de-streamed classrooms. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the teachers provide their perceptions of student learning outcomes and the impact of the higher academic expectations on students of all ability levels. The data reveal three key factors that have the greatest impact on positive outcomes in the de-streamed classroom, including the benefits of belonging to a positive learning community, the positive impact of effective administrative support, as well as the importance of positive teacher attitude. This study highlights the need for greater communication between administrators and in-service teachers in order to continue to improve de-streaming initiatives, and ultimately provide equity of access for all students to the highest standard of education.

Keywords: academic streaming; de-streaming; equity; learning community
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank all of my professors at OISE for their support and guidance throughout my studies. In particular, I would especially like to thank Cristina Guerrero, and Arlo Kempf, who acted as my research supervisors, tirelessly giving me valuable feedback and recommendations during the ongoing process of shaping and refining my research. Thanks also to Majd Zouda for her helpful and constructive comments. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to Rose Fine-Meyer, Joan O’Callaghan and Anne Wessels for their ongoing generous encouragement. All of these instructors possess an extraordinary passion for teaching, and research, continually demonstrating what it means to be an inspired and inspiring educator.

I would like to express my gratitude to the three teachers who participated in this study. I appreciate their openness, and willingness to share their perspectives with me, so that I could shed light on their experiences for others. I believe their efforts to create a more equitable learning environment for all students is crucial, and I greatly admire their level of commitment.

Thank you also to my colleagues in the MT program, who collaborated with me, and supported me, as we worked cooperatively on many group assignments and projects.

I greatly appreciate the constant support of my parents, who originally taught me the value and power of education. My daughters, Francesca and Liana Mortin have been a continual source of inspiration and encouragement, and initially taught me how to be a teacher through motherhood. Finally, I am deeply grateful for the unwavering support of my husband, David Mortin, who endlessly encourages me to follow my heart, and never ceases to believe in me and my abilities. An eternal optimist, despite his protests to the contrary, it was David who ultimately gave me the courage and confidence to trust that it is never too late.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context and Background

There has been a vast amount of educational research compiled within North America on the issue of academic streaming as far as its effect on student success. The practice of streaming in Ontario refers to the grouping of students according to previous academic achievement, with high performing students being placed in a so-called academic stream, the precursor to senior level university level courses. Meanwhile, previously lower performing students are placed in an applied level stream, consisting of both different curriculum and different course requirements.

One other major distinction between these two streams is that the academic stream offers direct entry into university level courses, whereas the applied stream does not. Access to university level courses from the applied stream requires completion of additional qualifying coursework in order to gain admission to the academic or university level stream. Originally, streaming (or tracking) was created to support both low and high achievers, so that neither would receive a compromised standard of education based on instruction that was either too accelerated or overly simplified. However, studies have typically found that low achievers, in fact, benefit more from an enriched curriculum, rather than a traditional remedial program as a means of improving learning outcomes (Singham, 2003). In other words, a school's best curriculum, reserved for its highest achievers, is best for all students. The combination of de-streaming and high standard curricula is the most effective means of increasing student achievement among low achievers.

Despite fears concerning the negative impact on high achievers, studies have also found that the performance of high achieving students remained the same after they had studied in
heterogeneously grouped classes. In other words, high achievers did not learn less when they studied alongside their average or low-achieving peers (Figlio & Page, 2002; Mason et al., 1992).

Since it is widely accepted that effective pedagogy is the single most important determinant of student learning outcomes (McPartland & Schneider, 1996), it follows then that effective implementation of de-streaming requires teachers to be fully supportive of de-streaming and differentiated teaching strategies. In a review of the literature, McPartland and Schneider (1996) concluded that international studies show that students can benefit both socially and academically from a single core curriculum of academically rigorous classes. However, they argue that such reform must be combined with positive teacher-student relationships; and consistent, high academic standards.

Nevertheless, many educators still strongly believe that streaming allows teachers to better match material and methods to students’ ability level. Some educators do not consider de-streaming a viable alternative because of the challenges to implementation. For example, in a case study of ten teachers at one high school, researchers found that teachers believed that heterogeneous classes were not only very difficult to teach but that all students received a less adequate education when they were not in classes grouped by ability (Rosenbaum, 2000).

Moreover, teachers are not the only opponents of streaming. This practice can be seen as a symptom of a much larger social ill that signifies an inequality of access to higher education based on race, gender and socio-economic status. In Restacking the Deck: Streaming by Class, Race and Gender in Ontario Schools, Clandfield et al. (2014) present research evidence demonstrating that “streaming based on class, race, gender and imputed special needs still occurs extensively in our schools” (p. 1). Although more working class and racialized minority students
are completing secondary school and being accepted into post-secondary institutions, “they are still suffering from substantial discriminatory treatment... and their odds of completing post-secondary education are still relatively poor” (p. 1). The authors argue that these conditions represent a gross social injustice, particularly given the widely-accepted view that “advanced formal education is an essential ingredient for the future well-being of our society” (p. 2). Furthermore, these authors declare that “systemic differences in wealth and power lie at the root of the form of social violence that is streaming” (p. 4). They argue that differential treatment of students through streaming occurs on various levels, through different types of schools, programs within schools and differential treatment of students, which is perpetuated by the powerful, affluent middle-class in order to preserve the status quo.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

It has been widely documented through a multitude of previous research studies that low-achieving students fare better in de-streamed learning environments, and that this success does not detract from the learning outcomes of high-achieving students (Clandfield et al., 2014; Saleh, Lazonder & De Jong, 2005). Given these outcomes, greater efforts should be made to implement de-streaming on a wider scale, so that more students can receive the positive benefits of a learning environment that embodies high academic standards. Following a de-streaming pilot project at Toronto’s Jackson Collegiate Institute in 2014-2015, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) broadened its initiative to include six more schools, in 2015-2016, as well as a seventh by the fall of 2016.

The purpose of this research is to determine the potential success or failure of the TDSB initiative as perceived by teachers, and in particular those teaching within these de-streamed
classrooms. By interviewing teachers directly involved in the project, I gathered firsthand accounts of the pedagogical strategies utilized by teachers to deliver curricula to a heterogeneous set of learners with highly varied previous achievement levels. I also sought to report and compare individual teachers’ qualitative perceptions of student learning outcomes and whether or not the higher academic expectations of de-streaming did, in fact, foster greater academic achievement levels for the majority of students. In addition, a qualitative analysis of teachers’ appraisal of the pilot project provided interesting information with regards to teachers’ attitudes about their involvement in de-streaming, their evaluation of student learning outcomes and their appraisal of the factors that contributed to the perceived success or failure of the initiative.

1.2 Research Questions

The research was guided by the following overarching questions. What is the experience of a small sample of teachers involved in de-streaming? How did they prepare for the greater academic heterogeneity of their class? To what extent do they feel their approach was successful? In addition, what are the teachers’ attitudes concerning the de-streaming initiative? What insights have these teachers gained from their experience that they would like to enact in future? In what ways do they feel students benefited from a heterogeneous classroom? Did it benefit all students equitably? Are there ways in which de-streaming detracted or compromised learning outcomes, as well as ways in which it apparently improved learning outcomes? In addition, it is important to ascertain the level of support that teachers received in their efforts to adapt their pedagogy to a de-streamed learning environment. How did teachers support each other in these initiatives? How would they describe the attitudes and level of support from parents and administrators?
1.3 Background of the Researcher

My parents were Italian immigrants who, as young children during the Second World War, were forced to leave school at a very young age. Following the war, they were both enlisted to help support their families during difficult financial times, and as a result received very little formal education. They profoundly regretted not being able to further their education, and consequently, instilled in me a deep appreciation for the power of education and privilege of being able to attend school.

As a teacher candidate, I believe that everyone has the right to access the highest standard of education available, and that equal opportunities should be extended to all students, so that they can be supported and encouraged to fulfill their individual potential and achieve the highest possible educational outcomes. I believe that in placing students in applied level courses in grade 9, the practice of streaming in the current educational system unjustly limits the prospects of adolescents at an age when they can still benefit from the encouragement of high academic standards. I also believe that prior to grade 9, developmental differences continue to exist between students and that to some extent academic success or lack of it might be attributable to varying maturity levels between students. Grade 8 students are quite young to have limitations placed on their future prospects, and placement in an applied educational stream can permanently limit learning outcomes, and lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and underachievement.

1.4 Overview

To more deeply explore my research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview three teachers and compare their methods for providing
differentiated instruction within a heterogeneous de-streamed classroom. In chapter two, I review the existing literature in the area of de-streaming and the success or failure of de-streaming initiatives. In chapter 3, I provide an explicit description of the research methodology. In chapter 4, I provide a report of my research findings along with a discussion of the relevance of my data with regards to existing research literature. In chapter 5, I identify the implications of my research findings as they relate to my own future practice as a teacher, as well as to the larger educational research community and guidance practitioners.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review - A Brief History of Streaming

2.0 Ontario Origins

The practice of grouping children according to ability level or age did not exist officially before the 1870s (Clandfield et. al., 2014). Prior to this time, students worked individually through material mandated by a centralized education authority, in what is commonly known as a ‘one room school house’ model. Each student progressed at her/his own pace, according to their individual level of proficiency, interests and particular familial circumstances. “Rural elementary schools often contained people ranging in age from 5 or 6 to 21 and older” (p.50), working side by side, in one shared space.

The move to organize students into uniform achievement classes was initially an economy move: school boards discovered they could hire fewer teachers and use less space if they divided students into groups according to achievement... The classification of students [was]... an efficient way for the system to process large...
numbers, not necessarily as something related to the needs or interests of students or school supporters” (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 50).

The practice of streaming students into homogenous groupings based on pre-determined ability levels continues to be a mainstay of the education system, regardless of ongoing controversy concerning its efficacy. This chapter reviews the existing literature on streaming practices, demonstrating an adverse effect on student achievement, particularly for students in the lower level streams. This analysis also examines potential reasons for the continuation of streaming practices despite their negative impact. Through an investigation of student demographics, existing studies shed light on the connection between the perpetuation of streaming and over-arching political factors related to students’ race, ethnicity and economic class. De-streaming places students of different ability levels together with accelerated instruction, thereby combining previously lower functioning students, who would have previously been placed in applied level classes, with higher achieving students already placed in the academic stream. The research also presents examples of de-streaming initiatives that have produced positive student outcomes for all ability levels, however, results are not generalizable, given the variety of forms of de-streaming practices. Nevertheless, de-streaming can produce significant positive educational outcomes for previously lower achieving students, while producing no negative effects for higher achieving students (Mitchell, 2010; Parekh, 2013; Singham, 2003). Finally, an examination of teacher attitudes towards de-streaming and recommended best practices provides an analysis of the pedagogical adaptations, professional development requirements and community supports required to ensure successful outcomes in de-streaming initiatives.
2.1 Why Streaming is Detrimental: Impact on Graduation Rates

Opponents of streaming point out that there are unintentional repercussions for lower achieving students, whose likelihood of attaining entrance to post-secondary educational programs is greatly diminished once they have been segregated from their higher-performing peers (Krahn & Taylor, 2000). In fact, research has continually shown that students in the lower streams have been far less likely to complete their secondary education. “During the 1980s, almost 80% of all Ontario students in Basic, the lowest level program, did not graduate” (Clandfield et. al., 2014, p.78).

In addition, those students who do manage to graduate from these lower streams achieve much lower levels of post-secondary education, and less stable employment, which has profound ramifications for their earning potential and overall quality of life. As Clandfield et. al. point out, “students’ chances and choices for higher education, job training and well-paid employment are decided in large part by their Grade 9 placement” (2014, p.79). In other words, a student’s opportunity for future success in life is largely determined by their academic placement at the beginning of high school.

2.2 Efficacy of Streamed versus De-Streamed Learning

2.2.1 Impact of streaming on student achievement. Studies focusing on the achievement effects of streaming demonstrate positive outcomes for high-stream students and negative effects for low-stream students, whereas studies focusing on ability grouping in which students are given the same curriculum in de-streamed groups tend to find little or no negative effect (Callaghan, 2005; Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010).
The detrimental impact of streaming appears to be centred around the lower-level streams. Once placed into lower-level groupings, “students can easily come to internalize their status, with the resulting poor self-image doing little to promote interest, motivation or success” (Clandfield et. al., 2014). Moreover, the data suggest that once a student has been placed in an ability level in grade 9, there is very little upward mobility over the course of his/her secondary education. In fact, the movement between levels tends to be downwards.

According to Clandfield et. al. (2014), streaming programs were initially intended to be accompanied by remedial programs that would provide support for students struggling in elementary school. They note, however, that “few if any alternatives have been provided for those who leave elementary school without the requisite academic skills to cope, let alone flourish, in the new Applied and Academic level programs. The ‘booster’ programs proposed never materialized, especially on the upgrading of reading and writing abilities” (p. 95).

Findings from several groundbreaking studies suggest the process of streaming actually contributes to the achievement gap between students in academic and vocational tracks (Mayer, 2008). These studies suggest that University-track courses tend to have better qualified teachers and more engaging coursework. Correspondingly, low-track courses tend to have less qualified teachers and coursework based on rote memorization (Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002). According to Rubin and Noguera (2004):

In many school districts it is common to assign new teachers and teachers who are not regarded as being particularly effective, to lower track classes, while more experienced and knowledgeable teachers are assigned to teach higher tracked students (p. 93).
2.3 Considerations of race, ethnic minority, and class division

Ability grouping, by its nature, is anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian, often creating racial or ethnic divisions that consign students to low-quality instruction and low-quality futures. In the Canadian context, Parekh, Killoran & Crawford (2011) studied the demographics of streaming in the TDSB, concluding that “students deemed less able to meet academic expectations are met with restricted access to resources and services that would otherwise provide them with greater career options” (p. 276). Streaming has been shown to provide inferior and inequitable education to students in the lower level streams, “separating students along race and class lines and... perpetuating unequal access to a college-bound curriculum” (Rubin, 2007, p. 4). Many U.S. studies have found that ethnic and racial minority students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be overrepresented in low-track classes, while affluent, white students tend to be overrepresented in high-track (university preparation) courses (Rubin & Noguer, 2004). Several studies also suggest that it is difficult for students to move between tracks (Ayalon & Gamoran, 2000). For example, Schiller (1999) found that most courses fall into a framework whereby new material is constantly building on previous work. As a result, U.S. students do not tend to switch tracks between 8th grade and high school because of a perceived inability to gain parity with higher achievers. Rubin and Noguera (2004) noted that it is “rare for students who are placed in lower tracks to be given the opportunity to ‘catch up’ and move on to higher tracks” (p. 93). Once the student has been placed in a lower-level track, the classification tends to be permanent.

Mickelson (2001) used survey data obtained from 2000 U.S. grade 12 English classes, designating students by ability stream to determine if schools were racially segregating students
into academic courses. She found African-American students were predominantly enrolled in low-track classes and were completely unrepresented in high-track classes. Mickelsen then used achievement data to ascertain if students' track placement had been based on past academic achievement. She found that placement did not correlate with previous achievement levels. She then looked at student data for those who had previously achieved grades above the 90th percentile. Of these, 52% of white students and only 20% of black students were now in the high-level stream. Mickelson attributes her findings to "racial segregation and the social and educational dynamics these forces unleash" (p. 241). Socioeconomic data from the TDSB echo Mickelson’s findings on racial differentiation:

The most recent Toronto board survey available, for the student cohort entering grade 9 in 2006 reports that 92% of students in the highest income neighbourhoods were in Academic programs, whereas only 56% of students in the lowest income neighbourhoods were in Academic programs (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 83).

With regards to high school graduation rates, Clandfield et al. present data demonstrating that racial disadvantages continue to exist in the Canadian educational system. According to their analysis, students who are White or Asian background had 82-91% graduation rates, whereas students who self-identify as Black, Latin, Mixed or Middle Eastern had graduation rates ranging from 65-78% (p. 97) They write:

The myth of ‘racelessness’ is rooted in Canada’s ‘historical narrative’ as a place that escaped the blight of slavery and racial oppression. Yet... race does matter plenty in Canada... now codified under federal anti-terror legislation, Bill 36... Whiteness is the visual image of normalcy for most people in Canada... The denial of difference
and differential experience undercuts the ability of racialized groups and other minoritized groups to achieve educational equity (p. 207).

In addition, Clandfield et al. (2014) present socioeconomic data showing that 40% of students from the lowest 10% of the socioeconomic spectrum did not apply to any post-secondary program, as compared to only 18% of their highest-income background peer group. Also, students in the lowest-income background level were 5 times as likely to be enrolled in Applied level courses and over 8 times as likely to be enrolled in vocational or locally developed programs (p. 98). Meanwhile, Parekh, Killoran and Crawford (2011) concluded that “the structure of the TDSB appears to be mirroring and supporting the socio-economic stratification found within society” (p. 275). Furthermore, “neoliberalism could be underpinning the economic rationale for a meritocratic system that determines which demographics are streamed into basic education tracks and away from more marketable education opportunities” (Parekh, Killoran & Crawford, 2011, p. 275).

In their meta-analysis of the existing literature, Rubin and Noguera (2004) also point out that streaming can be viewed as:

1) a way to perpetuate educational inequities along race and class lines
2) that placement in designated tracks corresponds strikingly with race and class privilege and
3) that advanced placement courses have disproportionate numbers of students from affluent backgrounds, while the lower tracks, especially remedial and special education courses, are filled with poor and economically disadvantaged students (p. 93).

The main advocates of streaming are middle to upper class parents and school administrators who seek to preserve the interests of the individual advantaged student over the
welfare of the larger student body (Clandfield et. al., 2014). Parents who are involved with school councils use their positions of privilege to maintain the status quo and advocate for the interests of their own child over a more equitable de-streamed model that will benefit all students (Clandfield et al., 2014; Goulbourne, 2011; Pharis et al., 2005).

As a consequence of streaming, disadvantaged students are segregated from the advantaged, which can lead to a favouring of the mainstream educational experience of the students who are already privileged in their social status. Streaming then denies disadvantaged youth equitable access to the best educational opportunities which may further undermine their self-esteem, school engagement, and serve to perpetuate stereotypes concerning lack of ability; in turn lowering student self-expectations, and leading to poor achievement levels (Clandfield et al., 2014).

Studies on tracking overwhelmingly demonstrate that students from wealthier and more advantaged family backgrounds tend to enter academic programs while students from poorer, disadvantaged homes are disproportionately likely to enroll in vocational programs. Kelly (2007) studied course placement criteria by analyzing the curriculum guides published by 92 high schools in North Carolina, finding that 63% of schools placed students into classes based on students' occupational goals in the 8th grade. The data also revealed that 43% of schools used teacher recommendations as the primary criterion for placement. When course placement is based on such highly subjective criteria, it is easy to see how this might lead to the continuation of historical practices of racial segregation and biased attitudes by teachers and administrators (which may then undermine a merit-based system).
Yonezawa et al. (2002) found students' own perceptions of their abilities limited the number of students in low-level tracks lobbying to move to high-level courses. One student said, "I knew about them, I just didn't think I had what it takes" (p. 51). Students were also unwilling to give up their peer group to move to another track. One reason for this was that students perceived that they would be isolated from their friends if they moved to high-level classes. One student said, "I feel weird in this class because I am the only black student. None of my friends are there" (p. 55). These observations shed light on the social stigma that surrounds streaming, and some of the challenges that schools face in their efforts to implement de-tracked programs.

### 2.4 The Impact of De-streaming on Student Achievement

Results from a de-streaming study by Burris and Welner (2005) indicate that the probability of completion of advanced math courses significantly and markedly increased in all groups, including minority students, students of low socioeconomic status, and students at all initial achievement levels. Also, the performance of initial high achievers did not differ statistically in heterogeneous classes relative to their previous achievement in homogeneously grouped classes. In order to achieve such success with de-streaming, “The new curriculum was taught to all students, in heterogeneously grouped classes. To support struggling learners, the school initiated support classes called math workshops and provided after-school help four afternoons a week” (Burris & Welner, 2005, p. 596).

The enriched, accelerated curriculum provided in academic classes appears to be more effective than a slower-paced remedial curriculum, as a means of increasing the achievement of initial lower achievers (Singham, 2003). Mason et al. (1992) found that the performance of high-achieving students remained the same on a standardized math test, after they had studied in
heterogeneously grouped classes. In other words, high achievers did not learn less when they studied alongside their average or low-achieving peers as opposed to when they had taken mathematics in homogeneous classes. Other studies have also revealed no significant differences in educational outcomes for high achievers when they are placed in heterogeneous classes that include both average and low achievers (Figlio & Page, 2002).

Despite a multitude of data demonstrating the positive effects of de-streaming, Rubin and Noguera (2004) state that “quantitative studies are inconclusive, with researchers claiming both positive and negative effects for de-tracking” (p. 93). They posit that a lack of consistently significant positive outcomes might be due to the fact that a wide variety of de-tracking reform practices make it difficult to obtain conclusive results.

These inconclusive results may also be due to the fact that students come to school with different levels of preparation, which may skew de-streaming outcomes, as well as research results. This issue of prior preparedness is not adequately addressed in de-streaming literature. Furthermore, the fact that some students are inherently predisposed towards higher achievement begins even before students enter school. Whereas, low birth weight, little exposure to literacy at home, and little or no pre-school are all factors associated with later poor academic achievement and ensuing achievement gap (Mayer, 2008).

2.5 Implementation of De-streaming

2.5.1 Case studies. There have been some small-scale studies of secondary schools that have successfully implemented school-wide de-tracking in the U.S. South Side High School in Rockville Center, New York gradually implemented heterogeneously grouped classes over the course of seven years (Garrity & Burris, 2007). The process of de-streaming courses involved
opening access to courses in the school's International Baccalaureate Program. The reform also included on-going professional development for teachers, and increased support to struggling students. In addition, administrators provided increased levels of communication with regards to student progress so that teachers, parents, and students could monitor their success throughout the reform. In the long run, administrators were able to credit higher graduation levels to their de-streaming efforts.

The Preuss School was founded in San Diego in 1999, in order to institute a de-streamed approach. The school serves 700 students in grades 6-12 (Alvarez & Mehan, 2007), comprised mostly of minority and low-income students. The Preuss School has the advantage of having hired school personnel who believe that all students have the capacity to succeed in a rigorous high academic curriculum regardless of background. Another unique aspect of the Preuss School is its affiliation with the University of California, San Diego. The school capitalizes on this partnership in order to encourage its students towards pursuing post-secondary education. Over 80% of the students from the schools' first graduating class went on to a four-year college program (Alvarez & Mehan, 2007). Both South Side High and the Preuss School are examples wherein administrators and teachers worked together to facilitate de-streamed learning environments. At the core of their reforms was the belief that all students were capable of meeting the high academic expectations of a college preparatory curriculum (Alvarez & Mehan, 2007).

2.6 Teacher attitudes

Extensive research on streaming conducted in the U.S. and U.K. suggests that “teachers have lower expectations of students in lower education streams and adapt their curriculum and
pedagogy in line with such expectations” (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010, p. 267). Some educators believe that de-streaming may not be a viable alternative to streaming because it is difficult to implement (Gamoran & Weinstein, 1998). Teachers at one high school professed to have difficulty in teaching multi-level groups and indicated that they felt all students received a less satisfactory education than in homogeneously grouped classes. A number of teachers interviewed by Clandfield et. al. (2014), revealed a belief that “the main reasons for the differential outcomes (of students, defined by race, ethnicity, social class and family structure) lay in the home, often as a result of ‘cultural’ differences” (p. 107). This observation of supposed cultural difference could be interpreted as an inherent bias on the part of teachers.

Many of these educators emphasized “what they saw as the benefit of good books in the homes of those students ‘fortunate’ enough to be raised in ‘literate’ settings... they often stressed the importance of parental expectations” (p. 108). However, other teachers and administrators believed that the reasons for differential educational outcomes were “rooted more in the schools... the ‘Pygmalion Effect’, where certain kinds of knowledge, values and skills are ignored, while other kinds are rewarded” (p. 109). A member of the administration reported that “the kinds of things that the school system generally doesn’t value are the kinds of strengths that kids have that come from inner-city families. I think that in most schools the curriculum and the kinds of programs that go on have nothing to do with the real lives of these kids” (p. 109).

In their literature review, McPartland and Schneider (1996) point out that de-streaming reform cannot happen in isolation; it must be combined with positive teacher - student relationships, uniform academic standards, and high quality implementation. Rubin (2007) notes that teachers’ beliefs about ability appear to have a profound impact on achievement outcomes in
the de-tracked classroom, along with students’ beliefs about their abilities, as well as those of the larger community. Widespread dissemination of information that encourages teachers, students and the community (including parents) to examine and challenge their preconceived notions concerning race and ability is crucial to the success of de-streaming efforts (Rubin, 2007).

In a noteworthy study, Lewis and Cheng (2006) surveyed a national sample of 300 secondary school principals. The surveys asked principals about the criteria they used to place students in vocational, general, and college/university tracks and the criteria they used to predict the destinations of their students after they graduated from high school. They hoped to determine whether race and socioeconomic status were still predictors of track placement. They found that schools serving racial minority and socio-economically disadvantaged students had proportionately more classes that were in the low-level stream. They also found that principals' expectations of students' destinations after high school were highly correlated with the socioeconomic status of their students. Lewis and Cheng's (2006) research reveals that elimination of tracking needs to be accompanied by changes in attitudes of administrators as well as teachers, given that administrators’ expectations of student success were impacted by racial and class bias, and ultimately impacting track placement. Since de-streaming initiatives are facilitated by teachers with the support of administration, it is necessary that both possess positive expectations for successful outcomes.

Although researchers have noted the importance of parental involvement, studies on de-streaming have failed to examine the attitudes of parents and the relationship between parental attitudes and student outcomes in de-streaming. Given the demonstrated importance of teachers’ and administrators’ attitudes in ensuring successful educational outcomes, it stands to reason that
parental involvement and support would also be an essential element to successful de-streaming. Parents of students who would otherwise be enrolled in applied level classes, can contribute to positive outcomes of de-streaming through positive encouragement, support and high expectations for success.

2.7 Pedagogical strategies for adapting the de-streamed classroom

The prospects for thoroughgoing elimination of streaming in our schools will ultimately depend on teachers who will take up different forms of pedagogy, including a critical approach in their classrooms, while linking with student, parent and community groups to demand structural changes in our schools (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 285).

In implementing de-streaming, it is essential that a curriculum be provided which is relevant, enriching, and challenging for the wide variety of students represented in these classes. A study by Rubin (2007) states, “the most successful instances of de-tracking combine deep structural reform with thoughtful pedagogical change, and are undergirded by an engagement with students’ and teachers’ beliefs around notions of ability and achievement” (p. 7). In the TDSB, de-streaming entails the elimination of an applied, lower-level stream, and placing all students in one academic stream. Teachers are encouraged to uphold high standards for all, while providing a wider variety of ways for children to achieve these standards (Slavin, 1995). Another important element in de-streaming is cooperative learning, which promotes achievement, and improves attitudes toward learning (Hecht et al, 2002). Additionally, proponents of de-streaming suggest that its success depends upon teachers employing new instructional approaches (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 95).
2.8 Conclusion

Given the widely documented detrimental impact of streaming practices, de-streaming should be universally implemented in order to bring greater access and educational equity to all students. However, as demonstrated through studies, the path to successful de-streaming is not straightforward and there are many challenges that lay ahead. This literature review provides an overview of research on streaming, de-streaming, its impact on student achievement, and teacher attitudes towards de-streaming. This review also analyzes the reasons why de-streaming is necessary for the success of all students, as well as shedding light on the fact that de-streaming has been resisted by the dominant class in order to maintain socio-economic and racial inequalities. It also illuminates the factors that are inherently important for successful de-streaming within the classroom, including positive teacher attitudes, professional development, mutual support between teachers and backing from administrators and parents. As a result, the purpose of my research is to learn about current de-streaming initiatives in the TDSB and to examine the ways in which educators have prepared for these initiatives, the level of community support and teachers’ perceived outcomes as indicators of overall success. Additionally, the research will aim to provide insight into future goals and de-streaming best practices, as indicated by educators on the front-lines of de-streaming reform.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction
In this chapter, I outline the research methodology that was utilized. I begin by introducing the research approach, procedures and instruments of data collection, after which I present detailed information regarding participant sampling and recruitment.

I give a detailed description of data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations related to my study. Additionally, I make note of methodological limitations, but also identify the strengths of the procedure. I conclude with a concise overview of choices made with regards to methodology as well as the reasoning employed in reaching these decisions which were determined according to the research questions and purpose.

As a study on de-streaming initiatives in the TDSB, it was essential to interview teachers directly involved in teaching de-streamed classes. My goal was to gain an insider’s view on the questions and pertinent issues at hand with regards to pedagogical best practices as well as student success.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

I conducted this research study using a qualitative methodology involving a detailed review of current, relevant existing literature on the subject as well as through semi-structured interviews with educators. A qualitative research style was appropriate for an examination of teachers’ viewpoints on best teaching and planning practices and student achievement in a de-streamed classroom, given that the goal was to obtain in-depth accounts of personal experiences. In addition, it was the most efficient manner in which to gather detailed viewpoints since the use of semi-structured interview allowed for thorough probing. This methodology rationale is in keeping with the views of Creswell (2007), who defines qualitative research as “an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses
inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subject’s point of view” (p. 274).

Furthermore, in a presentation of key criteria of qualitative research outlined by Creswell (2007) and Tracy (2010), both scholars contend that qualitative narrative research should focus on a single individual (or two or three individuals) in order that the data provide sufficient depth of analysis.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

I collected research data using the semi-structured interview protocol. I interviewed teachers directly in the field, at the schools where they work, which allowed me to bring a sense of authenticity to the interviews, “actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Focusing the data collection on a narrative style design (Creswell et al., 2007), enabled participants to convey detailed experiences and also allowed for “an interpretive, naturalistic approach... study[ing] things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Creswell, 2007, p. 36). Also, face-to-face research is conducive to interviews that provide “rich description and the understanding of participants’ points of view or meanings” (Babchuk & Badiée, 2010, p. 3). Additionally, Di Cicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) have noted that interviews should be personal, intimate, and open-ended, with questions eliciting detailed narrative accounts and anecdotes. Semi-structured interviews are more open-ended than structured interviews, which rely on a questionnaire of closed questions (Whiting, 2008), thus semi-structured interviews allow for a more dynamic and flexible approach.

3.3 Participants
In this sub-section I review sampling criteria utilized for participant recruitment purposes and discuss strategies used for securing teacher recruitment. I also include a section where I introduce each of the participants.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria. The criteria I employed in determining suitability for inclusion in my study consisted of direct involvement with de-streaming, such as having taught in a de-streamed class in the past, or preparing to teach in one in the short-term future. Another criterion for inclusion in the study was that teachers possess at least two years experience teaching in a streamed classroom so that they could give informed, insightful opinions and evaluations of their planning, implementation and outcomes based on reflection of the de-streaming experience in comparison with teaching in a streamed classroom.

3.3.2 Recruitment Procedures. To recruit participants, I contacted teachers working at schools in the TDSB who were reportedly involved in de-streaming initiatives. Through my network of colleagues at OISE, I was able to establish contact with three such teachers at a TDSB secondary school, who have all had experiences teaching in a de-streamed classroom setting.

3.3.3 Participant Biographies. Helen is a teacher at a secondary school in northwest Toronto, and has been teaching French for 13 years. She has been involved in a de-streaming initiative that has allowed her to teach de-streamed grade nine French for a year. In the 2015/2016 academic year, she has begun teaching de-streamed grade 10 as well. Prior to teaching de-streamed classes, she had experience teaching both applied as well as academic level courses.
Cathy is also a teacher at a secondary school in northwest Toronto, where she has taught geography for 12 years, at both the academic and applied levels. She has taught de-streamed geography for two years, and is now teaching it a third year, as well as beginning to teach grade 10 de-streamed geography as well.

Mary has been teaching English for five years, also at a secondary school in northwest Toronto. Mary has taught de-streamed grade nine English for one year, and is currently teaching it for her second year. During the 2016/2017 academic year, she is also teaching de-streamed grade 10 English for the first time.

3.4 Data Analysis

After conducting interviews, I transcribed the audio-recordings and coded each of the transcripts. In Creswell’s outline of the qualitative research procedure, he states that in inductive data analysis, researchers should “build their patterns, categories and themes from the bottom-up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information.” He goes on to say that “this inductive process involves researchers working back and forth between the themes and database until they establish a comprehensive set of themes” (2007, p. 39).

In keeping with this approach, I carefully analyzed apparent themes, re-shaping and synthesizing themes where appropriate. I went on to compare emerging themes against each other, making an effort to discern participants’ meanings, perspectives and subjective views, ultimately making interpretations about data in relation to pre-existing research on the subject.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

In order to ensure ethical standards were met and upheld, all participants were assigned a pseudonym and notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of
the research study. The participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and any identifying markers related to their schools or students will be excluded. As a result, the risks associated with participation in this study were minimal. Given the research topic, it was possible that a particular question might trigger an emotional response from a participant, thus making them feel vulnerable. I minimized this possibility by sending the interview questions to participants ahead of time, and by re-assuring them throughout the interview. In addition, the consent letter stated that they had the right to refrain from answering any question that they did not feel comfortable with, as well as re-stating their right to withdraw from participation. I have stored all my collected data (audio recordings) on my password protected computer and will be destroying it after five years. I also asked the participants to review and sign a consent letter (Appendix A) as documentation of their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. The consent letter provided an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and specified expectations of participation (one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview).

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

In terms of methodological limitations, “qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data source” (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). However, given the ethical parameters set by the Master of Teaching program, I was only permitted to interview teachers, and was therefore unable to undertake objective classroom observation, or include a wider sample of interview subjects including students and parents. Further limiting the scope of my research, I conducted interviews with a very small sample of participants. As a result, while the findings can add further
understanding to the practice of de-streaming and teachers’ experiences with it, the data’s generalizability to the experience of teachers at large is ultimately limited.

Despite these limitations, there are certainly strengths associated with this research approach as well. A one-on-one interview procedure provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect in an open-ended fashion on their practices, while at the same giving them the space to articulate how their practice unfolded through personal reflection. These teachers’ insights into their experience could be related to pre-existing literature and theory and used as both a prescriptive resource for future practice as well as a preventative tool which could aid other teachers seeking to maximize best practices and avoid pitfalls in teaching in a de-streamed classroom.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the research methodology utilized in this study, and provided a detailed explanation of the decisions and rationale for the approach taken with data collection and analysis. I provided a description and rationalization for the use of the semi-structured interview style and its limitations as well as its strengths. I outlined the strategies employed in recruiting participants along with the safety measures employed in order to ensure that ethical standards were upheld. In the next chapter, I report on the results of my research study.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will outline my findings based on qualitative research collected from three semi-structured interviews with in-service teachers currently involved in a Toronto District
School Board (TDSB) de-streaming initiative. Through my network of colleagues at OISE, I was able to establish contact with three teachers at the same secondary school, located in a predominantly low socio-economic area of Toronto. Each interview was forty-five to ninety minutes in length. I analyzed the data utilizing Creswell’s (2007) approach for qualitative data analysis, whereby I identified patterns, categories and themes. I then analyzed the emerging themes, making an effort to discern participants’ meanings, perspectives and subjective views, and interpreting the data in relation to pre-existing research.

The teachers, named Helen, Cathy and Mary, have all taught for at least three years in both streamed and de-streamed classrooms, thus allowing them to compare their teaching experiences in both learning environments. Helen and Mary had taught in a de-streamed setting for one year, whereas Cathy had taught a de-streamed class for two years. My main research question was: what are these teachers’ perceptions of this de-streaming initiative, and how did it impact student success?

The data clearly demonstrated that the teachers’ responses reflected three main factors that influenced student success. The first of these identified factors is the substantial benefit to students of belonging to a positive learning community created by the de-streamed, academic level classroom. Secondly, the teachers identified the support of the administrative and leadership team as instrumental to the initiative’s success. Finally, the findings reflect the importance of teacher attitude in determining potential outcomes of de-streaming. In particular, a positive attitude, variously manifested, produced a direct, positive impact on the initiative’s potential for facilitating student success. In Helen’s words, the key to successful de-streaming “is getting teachers to buy in”.

4.1 Benefits of Belonging to a Positive Learning Community

This section illustrates the benefits of a positive learning community through an examination of the following sub-themes: positive peer pressure; the extent to which de-streaming is beneficial to all students; the impact of being able to avoid the negative labelling associated with streaming; the fact that doors of opportunity to pursue post-secondary education are kept open for all students; and finally, avoidance of social segregation. The data overwhelmingly revealed that teachers witnessed a distinct benefit for all students to belong to a learning community in which higher skilled students have a positive impact on their lower-performing peers. This beneficial impact appears to create a sense of community among peers and an overall positive tone within the classroom.

4.1.1 Positive peer pressure. Teachers believed that students with well-established learning skills can have a positive impact on their lower-performing peers through direct pressure to work harder and improve their engagement. In addition, lower-performing students can be positively influenced by exposure to the high levels of motivation exhibited by their higher performing peers. Helen referred to one student in particular, whose interest level seemed to increase as a result of seeing the other students working hard. “It’s kind of by osmosis, she’s kind of absorbed that a bit. She’s still weaker, but she’s trying and she’s learning”. In addition, Helen witnessed the stronger students directly helping the weaker students. “Other times it’s just being that good influence in class and other students seeing, oh, if they can do it, maybe I can do it too”. This positive peer pressure was also observed by Mary, who said her classes were very supportive of each other. She witnessed stronger students “who had friends who were not strong and they would just get on their case and make sure they were tuned in”.

This finding that positive peer pressure impacts the potential success of de-streaming corresponds with earlier research demonstrating that cooperative learning promotes achievement and improves students’ attitudes towards learning (Hecht et al., 2002). In fact, Helen reported capitalizing on this beneficial impact of positive peer pressure by specifically grouping students to facilitate interaction between higher and lower performers, thus creating an environment more conducive to cooperation and positive peer pressure.

4.1.2 Possible benefits of de-streaming for students of all levels. Previous research has been inconclusive as to whether or not de-streaming benefits strong and weak students alike. Many parents and teachers continue to question whether poorer performing students might benefit from a curriculum and pedagogical strategies specifically designed for their pre-determined ability level. In addition, there has traditionally been concern over the negative impact of de-streaming on higher performing students. However, according to Helen, the de-streamed environment appears to benefit weaker and stronger students alike. Likewise, Mary observed that “there’s more community building going on in the [de-streamed] classroom... And they all kind of work off each other and help each other”. Cathy too, believes that teachers can take advantage of students’ prior ability levels to foster a cooperative atmosphere that is mutually beneficial. She indicated that “that’s something that you can actually bring out in the kids to help people. You can see the stronger kids try to help the weaker ones and it’s beautiful. You see the kids feeding off of positive energy”.

Although Helen acknowledged that some other teachers feel that de-streaming is “holding back the top students from pushing forward” because of the teacher’s need to continue “reviewing stuff for the weaker students”, nevertheless, “it hasn’t been a negative thing for the
stronger students”. In fact, as indicated earlier, Helen witnessed the stronger students placing positive pressure on the lower-level students to rise to their standard in terms of work ethic and achievement level.

The teachers’ perspective that de-streaming can be beneficial to strong and weak students alike reflects the earlier research of Figlio and Page (2002), Mason and colleagues (1992), and Singham (2003), whose findings each demonstrated a positive impact on initially low achievers, and no discernible detrimental effects on achievement for high performers.

**4.1.3 Negative label avoidance.** When placed into traditional lower-level groupings, “students can easily come to internalize their status, with the resulting poor self-image doing little to promote interest, motivation or success” (Clandfield et al., 20014). De-streaming may allow students who would have been placed in the applied level to avoid the negative impact of the lower stream labelling, which can impact self-esteem. Helen notes that de-streaming has a positive impact on self-esteem, as students realize they are capable of succeeding at the academic level. At the same time, Helen was also aware of the impact of negative labelling in her experience teaching applied level classes. She referred to it as a kind of vicious cycle in which the process of being placed in the applied level and being labelled accordingly seems to cause “a certain unmotivation, so it’s hard to say which comes first”.

The benefit of negative label avoidance was also demonstrated in the research of Yonezawa and colleagues (2002), who found that students in low-level streams had a negative perception of their own abilities as a direct result of low-level placement. Yonezawa and colleagues (2002) demonstrated through their findings that there is a significant social stigma
associated with streaming which students may internalize, and may ultimately lead to a self-
fulfilling prophecy.

4.1.4 Keeping doors of opportunity open. Previous research suggests that once students
have been placed in the lower level stream, there is very little chance for upward mobility to the
higher level stream. Rubin and Noguera (2004) noted that it is “rare for students who are placed
in lower tracks to be given the opportunity to ‘catch up’ and move on to higher tracks” (p. 93).
Lower level stream placement hence effectively restricts students’ opportunities to progress
beyond that level. This inherent limitation is reflected in Helen’s comment, “it’s like the choice
is taken away from them automatically”. She also observes that if students are given the choice
to challenge themselves to higher academic standards, they have a better chance of succeeding.

Helen acknowledges that the students who would have previously been in the applied
level stream may initially be at a disadvantage in the de-streamed classroom, and may “end up
with... 50s or 60s for their final grade, but they’ve passed”, which allows them to progress and to
continue to challenge themselves. Mary also expressed concern that some lower-level students
may only achieve marks in the mid fifties, and questioned if this was adequate preparation for
the next grade level. However, she still “like[s] the spirit behind it” and believes de-streaming is
“well intentioned”. In addition, the possibility to attend university continues to remain open to
these students, providing more equitable opportunities for them. De-streaming maintains the
potential to pursue university level courses, which would be limited by applied level placement.
In light of Yonezawa and colleagues’ (2002) findings that the streamed classroom negatively
impacts students through a resulting limited perception of ability, it is reasonable to surmise that
the opposite might be true in a de-streamed learning environment, which not only keeps the
doors of opportunity open, but may also foster student belief in their potential for success.

4.1.5 De-streaming decreases social segregation. In the streaming model of education,
lower performing students who enter grade nine are separated for the first time from their higher
performing friends. In fact, not only are they segregated from their community, but they are
removed from a learning environment where they might benefit from the positive influence of
their higher performing peers. Helen believes this resulting social segregation can have negative
ramifications that impact students. In her previous experience with applied classes, she observed
that “a lot of the students were... despondent and aggressive and unmotivated and I think that...
their negative attitudes were contagious”. She also notes that streaming in grade nine would
mark the first time that students are experiencing segregation. In Helen’s opinion, this is another
benefit of de-streaming, that “they’re just grouped along with everybody else the way they were
in elementary school and they still have opportunities to improve”.

Moreover, the findings of Clandfield and colleagues (2014) demonstrated that students in
the lowest income level were five times as likely to be enrolled in the applied level stream, and
over eight times as likely to be enrolled in vocational programs. This suggests that not only does
streaming separate students from their friends and higher performing peers, it appears to
segregate students based on socio-economic status as well. In addition, Parekh, Killoran and
Crawford (2011) concluded that “the structure of the TDSB appears to be mirroring and
supporting the socio-economic stratification found within society” (p. 275). Consequently,
placing students of all socio-economic backgrounds together in one academic stream acts as a
way to minimize this social segregation along socio-economic lines. Hence, de-streaming contributes to greater equity for all students.

4.2 Impact of Administrative/Leadership Support on Program Success.

Within this second section, I present findings associated with teachers’ perceptions of the impact of administrative and leadership support on program success. This notion will be further broken down as follows, examining: teachers’ experiences with provision of resources; additional teacher support; the extent to which liaising with parents influenced outcomes; the impact of class size and team teaching; as well as the degree to which teachers felt that their feedback on the initiative was sought out and valued by administration. Lewis and Cheng’s (2006) research demonstrates how administrators’ expectations of student success are as important as teachers’ attitudes towards de-streaming in terms of ensuring successful outcomes. Administrators can support teachers and de-streaming implementation in several beneficial ways, as follows.

4.2.1 Provision of resources, and additional teacher support. When I asked the teachers about whether or not they felt supported by administration, they had differing experiences of the extent to which they were being supported. According to Helen, the administration made a promise to provide additional teacher support, for which they did follow through. Cathy, as well, talked about receiving additional teacher assistance, however, in her point of view, the level of intervention was somewhat lacking. “This is something that we need everyday, not just like 2 times a week or 2 times a month”. In fact, Cathy’s dissatisfaction with the lack of adequate support was palpable. She had experienced a heightened need for additional support given the sheer number of students requiring extra help, and she expressed great
frustration with not being able to help them all. Meanwhile, Mary’s perspective aligned with Helen’s. She found the additional teacher support facilitated by administration to be effective and highly appreciated, providing students with valuable one-on-one time with a support teacher.

The importance of the administration’s willingness to provide support through additional resources is made evident through the successful de-streaming initiatives of South Side High School in Rockville Center, New York, and the Preuss School in San Diego. In both cases, researchers Garrity and Burns (2007) and Alvarez and Mehan (2007) respectively found a strong correlation between successful de-streaming outcomes and positive working relationships between administrators and teachers. Given these findings, it is reasonable to assume that Helen and Mary’s perceptions of the success of the initiative may be linked to their sense of being well supported by administration. Whereas, Cathy did not seem to feel as though she was receiving the level of support which she needed in order to facilitate the best learning outcomes for all students. Since all three teachers teach at the same school, it would be interesting to question whether Cathy’s divergent experience with administrative/leadership support signifies that an improvement in administrative support occurred between the first and second year of the initiative.

4.2.2 Extent to which liaising with parents influenced outcomes. The data from the South Side High School in New York (Garrity & Burris, 2007) and the Preuss School in San Diego (Alvarez & Mehan, 2007) pointed to the positive impact of high expectations on student success in relation to de-streaming. Parents, in addition to teachers and administrators, may potentially provide support and positive encouragement with regards to de-streaming outcomes. Thus, it is interesting to note that in Helen’s point of view, the parents in her school community
had not reacted at all to the initiative. In fact, it was her sense that perhaps they were not even aware of the change. She acknowledges that “most of the parents have no idea what’s going on at the school because they’re busy working shifts and keeping their lives together”. In addition, Cathy echoed Helen’s observations concerning parental involvement when she said that “in this school, parents don’t even care if they’re doing de-streaming”.

Given the findings of Clandfield and colleagues (2014) that many educators believe positive learning outcomes are impacted by parental expectations, it is therefore important that parents are supportive of their child’s involvement in a de-streaming initiative. Administrator communication with parents may help to facilitate support and involvement of parents through creating greater awareness of de-streaming initiatives. Whereas, administrator’s lack of communication with parents may presumably have a detrimental impact on student success, by neglecting to attend to one of the factors which could potentially influence positive outcomes. However, these teachers all noted that in this case communication with parents was minimal, a single letter home, hence a factor that could potentially have helped to improved the success of the initiative was neglected.

**4.2.3 Impact of class size and team teaching.** The three teachers interviewed all identified class size as an important factor that impacts potential outcomes for de-streaming. In their view, administrators must be supportive of capping class sizes, which in the traditional streamed model can be quite a bit larger for academic classes than for applied. Lower class sizes allow teachers to spend more time with students who require additional support. In fact, Helen noted that “even an extra five students can make a big difference”. Cathy also expressed definite frustration with the administration’s failure to establish new caps on class sizes based on a de-
streamed environment. According to Cathy, “what it means is that the class size is going to be the academic class size... The ideal would be like 20, but it will never happen”. Nevertheless, Cathy strives to remain positive about the initiative observing that many of the students who previously would have been in the applied level have been making great efforts to succeed in the de-streamed class, and so “it can work, given that certain things can be met, such as capping class size”.

Research has identified team teaching as a factor that can productively impact student outcomes in a de-streamed class, since teachers in a new initiative are often required to create new resources. Sharing resources and strategies can provide teachers with enhanced support and potential for improved pedagogical strategies. For example, Helen observed that together with her colleagues, they were able to identify students who were experiencing difficulty, which meant they could act quickly to support those students so that they wouldn’t fall too far behind. However, Helen also expressed dissatisfaction with the follow-through on team teaching based on circumstances related to current teacher contract negotiations. “Because of this work to rule, we have no staff meetings... so I really don’t know what’s going on in the other classes”. Cathy too, reported a sense of not feeling supported by her colleagues, stating “I’m sick of being the only one who is actually doing all of the things and developing all of the resources and really caring”. Whereas, Mary reported feeling positively about the cooperative efforts of her colleagues, and a sense of support throughout.

These teachers’ observations should be considered in relation to previous research results demonstrating the importance of positive working relationships between administrators and teachers, as well as between teachers themselves, working cooperatively to facilitate student
success in de-streamed learning (Alvarez & Mehan, 2007; Garrity & Burns, 2007). In light of these earlier research findings, it is evident that Helen and Mary’s sense of support by administration/leadership as well as colleague support may be contributing to their sense of the initiative’s overall success. Whereas, Cathy’s lack of support may be having a negative impact on her experience of the initiative.

4.2.4 Valuing teachers’ feedback. Teachers on the front line of a de-streaming initiative can be a great source of information regarding best strategies and the supports still needed to better facilitate the program. In Helen’s experience, administration made an initial effort to include teachers in the decision about whether or not to institute the de-streaming initiative. While there were mixed views concerning the potential effectiveness of de-streaming, administration forged ahead with the initiative regardless of some initial teacher dissension. However, administration did not solicit teachers’ views on the efficacy of the initiative following implementation. Helen believed administrators should be soliciting teachers’ views “cause we know best what was working and what wasn’t”.

Similarly, Cathy clearly felt that her feedback had not been valued or even listened to. She interpreted this as a desire on the part of administration to determine the initiative a success without any teacher consultation. She stated that “the admin. is basically just pushing for 100% passing rate. They don’t really care if they’re like really passing themselves or really learning anything”. Furthermore, Cathy went on to say, “nobody is listening to what we have to say... we are really the ones who are in the classroom. We really know what is necessary to be done in order that this could be successful”. Finally, Cathy’s frustration with the lack of communication between administration and teachers is evident in her observation that administration had not
even told her that a de-streaming initiative was being implemented. She figured it out based on the varied performance levels of her students. This lack of direct communication by administrators is noteworthy given the well documented correlation between effective administrator to teacher communication and positive outcomes (Alvarez & Mehan, 2007; Garrity & Burris, 2007).

4.3 Teachers’ Attitudes Towards De-streaming

This third section examines the teachers’ attitudes towards de-streaming, examining how this relates to their perceptions of student success in the initiative. This concept will be broken down to include an analysis of the teachers’ willingness to deliver differentiated instruction, their flexibility and adaptability; their willingness to receive training; teacher belief in equal opportunity for all students; the impact of teacher hopefulness when met with setbacks; and the effect of teachers continuing to view students according to streamed groupings.

4.3.1 Flexibility and willingness to differentiate instruction. In response to the varied needs of a heterogeneous group of students, Helen reported varying activities, employing kinesthetic strategies, small group work and authentic instruction. Helen also differentiated evaluation, “giv[ing] more open-ended evaluations where you might have a choice... to give them more opportunities to succeed”.

However, Cathy expressed experiencing great challenges. She revealed that she was not able to maintain academic level expectations, which resulted in a loss of engagement among the higher performing students. Cathy reported accommodations to evaluation that she needed to make in order to teach such a varied group of learners, involving fewer assignments and tests. In addition, to evaluation modifications, Cathy discussed planning and implementation
accommodations, that necessitated being flexible and adaptable when she was not able to meet curriculum expectations within the anticipated timeframe.

Whereas, Mary felt that her teaching strategies did not need to be altered significantly. She was able to maintain academic expectations. “Things I might do to support students who need more support are things I might do all the time as a teacher”. However, Mary did include additional scaffolding and alterations to course evaluation practices, and more consistent feedback through formative assessment.

These examples of pedagogical reform on the part of these teachers is necessary, especially in light of the multitude of research indicating that the success of de-streaming initiatives depends on teachers employing new instructional approaches (Clandfield et al. 2014). Furthermore, according to Rubin (2007), teacher willingness to engage in instructional reform is of vital importance to student success in de-streaming. Rubin (2007) also noted that “the most successful instances of de-tracking combine deep structural reform with thoughtful pedagogical change... undergirded by... teachers’ beliefs around notions of ability and achievement” (p. 7).

4.3.2 Teacher willingness to receive training. Research findings demonstrate that effective de-streaming is linked with high quality implementation (McPartland & Schneider, 1996), therefore it stands to reason that training workshops would help prepare teachers for working with a heterogeneous group of learners. Cathy was quite willing to participate in workshops, however, her administration failed to communicate the reason for her attendance, creating confusion for Cathy. Nevertheless, Cathy did feel that workshop attendance was valuable and so she continued to attend. However, the fact that her colleagues did not share the
same commitment was disappointing. “I’m kind of like the only one who’s going to these workshops...so, I have no support. I have no one to talk to in this school”.

Researchers Alvarez and Mehan (2007) demonstrated that teacher belief in the potential success of a de-streaming initiative is a significant determinant in successful outcomes. With this in mind, Cathy’s perceived lack of support could potentially negatively impact her judgement of the initiative’s success.

4.3.3 Teacher belief in equal opportunity Teachers’ beliefs about their students’ abilities have a profound impact on achievement outcomes (Rubin, 2007) in the de-streamed classroom. In order for successful de-streaming to be implemented, teachers must be supportive of the initiative, and willing to “challenge their preconceived notions concerning race and ability” (Rubin, 2007). Initially, Helen was apprehensive about teaching in a de-streamed classroom, “because when I taught those applied classes last year, I had a difficult time... if even half those students are mixed with the academic kids how is that going to go?” However, she also realized the value of the initiative in creating equitable learning opportunities for all.

This appreciation for the importance of equitable opportunities for all students was echoed by Cathy, who stated, “I think de-streaming is offering students the chance to just be part of the whole rest of the group and to have equal opportunity for meaningful learning... to sort of be pushed intellectually”. Given that numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of a de-streamed learning situation for all initial achievement levels (Burris & Wellner, 2005; Figlio & Page, 2002; Mason, Combs & Washington, 1992; Singham, 2003), it is evident that the most equitable learning situation is one which provides the best learning opportunities for all.
Teachers who believe in equity will endeavour to provide the best learning opportunity for all of their students.

4.3.4 Teachers’ continued determination in the face of setbacks. Although the teachers each experienced inherent challenges at times with teaching in a de-streamed learning environment, it is interesting to note that despite varying levels of frustration with the program, the teachers all maintained a sense of optimism in the potential success of de-streaming efforts. For example, both Helen and Mary believe in the benefit to all learners, particularly previously lower performing students. According to Helen, “no matter what your level, you can progress, and get better and learn...[and] at least see that it’s possible”.

However, Mary expressed her concern about adequately preparing students who were struggling more with course material, and yet ultimately, she said she still believes in the potential of the initiative and “like[s] the spirit behind it”.

Whereas, Cathy experienced greater frustration with her geography students, and a sense that her efforts were less effective. “I’m not able to do everything that I used to be able to do, like I did back then with the academic class”. In fact, Cathy expressed significant dismay at her estimation that the program was not working in its current iteration. Specifically, she said, “They’re not really thinking about the kids... And it will work, but we need to have enough resources in place, but we don’t have that, so stop pretending that it’s working. Because right now, a lot of the reason why these kids are passing is because we’re making them.”

4.3.5 Effect of continuing to view students by stream. If labelling associated with lower-level streaming has a negative impact, as indicated by previous research studies, then it is interesting to examine whether teachers continue to view students according to previous
streaming categorization, or if their expectations for all students have been elevated to the same academic standards. Even though students may be grouped together, teachers may continue to view students according to prior streaming labels, which may impact student success. In response to this question, Helen stated that she treated all students as though they were academic, and that “the students, by their reactions, they’ll teach you how to teach”. Likewise, Mary offered that she had been responding to all of her students with the same expectation standards. In fact, part way through the semester she and her colleagues decided to check which students had chosen the applied stream, prior to being de-streamed. She was surprised to discover which students had done so.

However, Cathy’s response revealed that by necessity she continues to view her students according to traditional streams. She feels compelled to view them this way to prevent lower performing students from falling behind. “I have to start lowering my standards”. Although Cathy initially teaches according to academic level standards for all students, ultimately, she feels compelled to reduce expectations for the lower performing students. Meanwhile she offers twice as many expectations for higher performing students, albeit regretfully. Her disappointment with the situation is further evident in her comment, “academic kids are really good, like they would do the homework at home. (Whispering) But not the applied kids... So these kids constantly are behind”. In addition, Cathy expressed concern over the fact that administration and leadership were considering eliminating final exams altogether, in order to help boost grades for students. Cathy is unsettled by the sense that this is not helping to prepare students for university, where they will certainly be required to write exams. Finally, Cathy volunteered her opinion as to why lower functioning students are less prepared than they should
be, stating, “they’re not given high expectations when they’re in elementary school. I guess the teachers are not accountable... And then when they come here in high school... it’s too late”.

Cathy’s perspective is reminiscent of the documented findings of Clandfield and colleagues (2014), who discovered that teachers believed that students’ differential outcomes were a result of cultural differences and home life circumstances. Attributing performance level to cultural difference could also, however, be suggestive of intrinsic teacher bias.

Although not all of the teachers continued to view students according to their previous streaming categories, it is important to consider the impact that lowered expectations have on students. Stevens and Vermeersch’s (2010) research reflects the same outcome experienced by Cathy, that she had to offer a less challenging, and less comprehensive curriculum to the lower performing students. As a result, Cathy was not able to offer the equitable learning environment intended through the de-streaming initiative. Given the challenges she faced in implementation and students not meeting academic standards, Cathy was ultimately forced to perpetuate the inequity of standards and curriculum that existed in the previously streamed system.

4.4 Conclusion

Teachers who have taught in a de-streamed environment have invaluable firsthand experiences with particular strategies that can inform future teaching practices and further promote successful outcomes. When questioned about recommendations for future teachers of de-streamed classes, the teachers had several areas of advice. Helen’s suggestions were to make use of human resources, to “stay on top of the students who are weaker”, and intervene immediately if they skip class, and also to differentiate instruction as much as possible. Whereas, Mary’s attitude was to “approach it with the same enthusiasm... the same positive expectation,
that they should with any classroom”. Finally, Cathy’s words of wisdom were: “do not give up hope”. Although she identified several challenges, she still maintained belief in the initiative and the practice of de-streaming.

The three teachers interviewed had all been teaching in a de-streamed environment for at least one year and maintained varying opinions regarding the initiative’s current success. Nevertheless, the teachers all identified several benefits to all students, such as the fact that a classroom containing the highest performing students becomes a positive learning community and a positive influence to all students. This positive impact may take the form of peer pressure on behalf of the students who need encouragement and motivation. Other identified potential benefits include the ability to avoid social segregation and negative labelling associated with a lower level stream. In addition, students may be able to maintain the potential of high academic standards and expectations, and consequently, preserve the possibility of pursuing a post-secondary education.

Moreover, there were several crucial factors identified which are dependent on the support of administration and leadership. In some cases, teachers felt these supports were at their disposal, and in some they didn’t. These factors included the provision of additional teacher support, access to workshops and professional development, setting new caps for class sizes, facilitation of team teaching, and seeking out feedback from teachers directly involved in de-streaming. It is worth noting again that Cathy had been teaching in a de-streamed environment longer than Helen and Mary, which may indicate a change in the level of administrative/leadership support, given that both Helen and Mary felt more supported than Cathy did.
Through these interviews, and in keeping with previous research, it became evident that the teachers themselves had a crucial role to perform in determining the outcome of the initiative. The factors identified by teachers as especially important included flexibility, the willingness to differentiate instruction and to receive appropriate additional training. Research findings also revealed further influences on the successful implementation of de-streaming, such as teacher belief in equal opportunity despite continuing to identify students by ability level, as well as continued determination to proceed in the face of potential setbacks and challenges.

Overall, the consensus was that teachers continued to be convinced that de-streaming could work. In theory, they all believed that there was hope for the initiative and that all students should have equitable access to the highest level of education, despite the fact that their current environment might not provide all the necessary supports for optimum facilitation of de-streaming.

Finally, in chapter five I will provide an overview of the key findings and their significance, and discuss the implications of these findings for the educational community as well as my own future professional practice. Additionally, I will provide recommendations based on these findings and identify areas where further research could be targeted in order to determine successful de-streaming practice.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of my key findings with regards to teachers’ perceptions of whether or not the current de-streaming initiative was successful and what factors
might have impacted educational outcomes. I will examine the prospective significance of the findings represented in the data. In addition, I will analyze the implications of the data with regards to the educational community at large, as well as in relation to my developing pedagogical practice and my own professional identity as an educator. Furthermore, I will present recommendations for future de-streaming practice, based on the implications of my findings. Finally, I will identify areas for further research, which might help provide further insight on the specific practices that might facilitate positive outcomes in the de-streamed classroom.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Overall, my research findings centred around three key factors that appeared to have the greatest impact on positive outcomes in the de-streamed classroom, as reported by the interviewees. The first two factors are the benefits for learners of belonging to a positive learning community, and the positive impact of effective administrative support. The third factor is the importance of teacher attitude, both in terms of teacher support of the initiative, as well as teacher willingness to adapt to the particular needs of students within the de-streamed learning environment were reported to be highly impactful.

The benefits of a positive learning community were based on teachers’ observations that higher performing students effect a kind of positive peer pressure on lower performing students. This peer pressure took the form of inspiring students to challenge themselves to reach a higher standard of achievement, as well as exerting explicit pressure on classmates to engage and apply themselves to the task at hand. The participants also reported their perspectives on student progress within the initiative. In the case of two of the teachers, Helen and Mary, de-streaming
seemed to result in an overwhelmingly positive impact on students of all ability levels. Whereas, past research seemed to be inconclusive with regards to the positive outcome of de-streaming. In addition, previous research indicates that parents, teachers and administrators continue to be unconvinced of the benefits of de-streaming, given that research to date has not been able to provide conclusive positive results for students of all ability levels (Clandfield et al., 2014). In particular, there have been concerns that lower performing students may not receive the level of support they may require, and consequently, the standard may be lowered in order to accommodate the lower performers, negatively impacting the higher achieving students. In Cathy’s case, de-streaming did in fact prove to be a very challenging environment, and did not, in her opinion, yield the benefits that it should have or could have. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that Cathy continued to believe in the potential of de-streaming to provide equity of access, and a positive and inspiring influence on students who had previously been low level achievers. Cathy’s experience, thus, represents a tension between the potential equity benefits of de-streaming, and, at the same time, presented challenges to implementation that resulted in her having to lower her standards for some students who were struggling academically.

Notably, all three teachers remained firmly committed to attempting to improve their practices within the de-streamed classroom, and all shared the belief that de-streaming allows students to continue to aspire to a university level education, should they desire it. According to all three teachers, de-streaming also allows previously lower achieving students to avoid the implications of being labelled according to a lower level stream. This is significant since previous research shows that streaming labels can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby
students lack the confidence in their ability to perform according to academic level standards, and as a result may become underachievers.

The research also demonstrated the impact of administrative and leadership support on the success of a de-streaming program. All three teachers discussed the importance of receiving support in the form of additional resources, additional teacher support within the classroom, as well as through team teaching. In addition, the teachers all believed that administrators could assist with facilitating effective communication with parents and providing information regarding the initiative, acknowledging that parent support of the initiative could positively impact outcomes. The teachers also drew attention to the fact that de-streamed classes require new enrollment caps, given the heterogeneity of achievement levels, making it more feasible for teachers to accommodate the needs of all learners striving to meet the standards of an academic classroom. Given that in-service teachers are on the front lines of implementing de-streaming in the classroom, the teachers also felt that it was important that their experiences and views on best practices be heard and attended to by administration, in order to improve the program and ensure best outcomes.

Finally, the research demonstrated that the teachers’ attitude towards de-streaming had a direct impact on perceived outcomes. Included within this idea is a willingness on the part of teachers to adapt and modify pedagogical practices to include greater differentiation. This finding aligns with previous research (McPartland & Schneider, 1996), which demonstrated that effective pedagogy and positive teacher attitude towards de-streaming were the single greatest determinants of student success. The teachers interviewed also acknowledged that further training and professional development with regards to best practices within a de-streamed
classroom would be beneficial, and that, specifically, in Cathy’s case, her own willingness to attend workshops, did provide her with adaptive strategies to incorporate into her pedagogical practices in a de-streamed environment. In addition, the teachers all demonstrated a commitment to the initiative as well as a belief in the importance of equal opportunity for all students, which is conceptually central to the vision of de-streaming efforts. This sense of responsibility towards providing equal access to all students seemed to allow teachers to maintain a positive attitude regarding the potential success of this de-streaming initiative, even in the face of challenges and possible setbacks. Cathy, especially, experienced hurdles with students who were struggling to keep up with the standards of achievement of an academic level curriculum. However, Cathy’s continued commitment to the importance of an equitable learning environment and opportunities is a testament to the significance of “teacher buy-in”, as expressed by Helen. Evidently, belief in potentially successful learning outcomes for all students allows teachers to continue striving towards improving pedagogical practice in order to effectively facilitate best outcomes for students and ensure the program’s success.

5.2 Implications

This research study provides an opportunity to obtain firsthand feedback from teachers directly involved in a current de-streaming action plan in the TDSB. Given Cathy’s challenges with implementation and student success, one of the most striking findings to come out of the data is the fact that all three of the teachers expressed a persistent and unwavering belief in the potential success of de-streaming with regards to learning outcomes for students of all ability levels, even in the face of setbacks and challenges. This finding goes hand in hand with the necessity for viewing any educational initiative as a work in progress that will continue to evolve
and improve with feedback from front line teachers. Those directly involved in teaching de-streamed classrooms can offer valuable insights on their experiences, which will help enormously to assess the efficacy of current practices within the existing initiative. In-service teacher feedback can also go a long way towards improving de-streaming practices and facilitating the greatest potential level of student success within the initiative.

5.2.1 The Educational Community. In terms of the educational community at large, educators and administrators need to be aware of the importance of clear communication in order to facilitate best outcomes with a de-streaming initiative. Effective communication is essential between administration and teachers, amongst teachers themselves, and between administrators, teachers, parents and students. For example, teachers may potentially inadvertently communicate their attitude towards de-streaming to the students themselves, which may also impact outcomes. If students are impacted by negative labelling, as demonstrated by Yonezawa et al (2002), then teachers’ awareness and attention to labels, as they relate to students’ previous performance levels, may presumably impact students’ own perceptions of their ability levels, and in turn influence achievement outcomes. With regards to pedagogical practice, the research demonstrates that teachers should focus on capitalizing on the potential benefits of a positive learning community by encouraging community building within the classroom. Helen was doing this through grouped student seating, which took into account varying ability levels, in order to facilitate student support, and positive peer pressure. In addition, the research findings indicate that positive teacher attitude leads to greater chances for successful outcomes, given that a positive attitude will encourage teachers to remain committed
in their efforts to adapt curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices to the needs of a heterogeneous group of learners.

Finally, given that Helen and Mary’s experiences with de-streaming were more positive than Cathy’s, and that they were teaching in the second year of the initiative, it is reasonable to deduce that there had been improvements with regards to additional teacher support. Additionally, there may have been improvements in between teacher support in the form of team teaching, as well as improved levels of administrative support, helping to facilitate better outcomes with the initiative. This apparent improvement from the first to the second year of the action plan suggests that viewing the initiative as a continually evolving work in progress encourages improvements that ultimately benefit any de-streaming initiative and its potential impact on student learning.

5.2.2 My Professional Identity and Practice. Throughout the course of my research on de-streaming, I have solidified my own commitment to equity of access to education. The research has shown me the importance of a supportive learning community, in which students support each other through a benevolent influence and peer pressure as well as positive relationships. It will be my goal to continually identify ways to facilitate the development of a positive learning environment and community through encouraging helpful student inter-relationships, but also in the way that I view students and interact with them. Having a positive attitude regarding students’ potential for success is evidently crucial to their own perception of their potential ability, given the detrimental impact of negative labelling (Yonezawa et al., 2002) that accompanies streamed learning environments. This idea also relates to the potential detrimental impact of maintaining preconceptions with regards to ability, based on previous
performance levels. Mary reported checking to see which students had actually chosen to be in the lower level stream, and being ultimately surprised to discover that in several cases these students were in fact performing strongly within the de-streamed academic classroom. This suggests the importance of challenging one’s preconceptions which are not necessarily indicative of students’ actual ability, and which may be limiting to students.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on these research findings, my recommendations are that school boards continue to implement de-streaming initiatives, given that this research indicates a greater tendency towards a positive impact on all students’ learning outcomes. In fact, both Helen and Mary felt that all of their students had been positively impacted by the de-streamed learning environment. Meanwhile, Cathy reported experiencing challenges to implementation as well as to student success. Despite these challenges, Cathy did see potential for improvement and witnessed aspects of the early formation of a positive learning environment. In all three teachers’ experiences, they identified areas for improvement, which would have facilitated greater success with the initiative. These areas included increased resources through workshops and enhanced training, increased team teaching and additional teacher support, as well as greater communication with administration and parents, along with a commitment on behalf of administration to creating new caps on class sizes.

The research findings also indicate that a positive attitude and dedication to equity of access on the part of teachers and administration goes hand in hand with positive outcomes. I would thus recommend that prior to de-streaming implementation, administrators strive to provide ongoing training, both in terms of professional development seminars, as well as in-
school training with teachers already experienced with de-streaming. I would also recommend that administrators endeavour to facilitate the greatest level of communication with and amongst teachers involved, as well as with parents, providing explicit rationale for de-streaming implementation. In addition, once de-streaming is initiated, administrators should maintain an ongoing dialogue with teachers in order to obtain their perspectives and experiences with the program, in order to continually improve the initiative and ensure best outcomes.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

During the course of data collection, it became apparent that teachers’ attitudes towards de-streaming might be impacting their perceptions of the success or failure of the initiative. In other words, teachers might be impacting student success through inherent communication of their biases for or against the initiative. Consequently, teachers were asked about whether or not they had continued viewing students according to previous streaming standards. In Helen and Mary’s case, they indicated that they were maintaining academic standards for all their students, and coincidentally, their perceptions of the initiative and experiences were more positive. Meanwhile, Cathy experienced greater challenges maintaining academic standards for all, and felt forced to lower her standards over time. When questioned about whether she continued to view students as either academic or applied level, Cathy indicated that she did in fact segregate students, and ultimately offered them different curriculum based on these classifications. It would therefore be worthwhile to conduct further research into the reasons why some students might be able to rise to academic level standards while others might not. Additional qualitative research that includes student interviews and focus groups might provide insight into the specific factors that correlate with student success in a de-streamed learning environment. It is apparent,
following data analysis, that it would also be pertinent to explore the extent to which outcomes might differ between disciplines. Helen teaches French, while Mary teaches English, and Cathy teaches Geography. Do their divergent experiences with student outcomes reflect inherent differences related to the subject of instruction? Cathy observed that students in her class seemed poorly prepared for grade nine Geography. In her opinion, this lack of sufficient preparation at the primary level, may have resulted from inadequate teacher and curriculum accountability. Certainly in the case of English instruction, there is accountability in the form of the EQAO standardized testing measures. A review of the literature on de-streaming failed to reveal research specifically targeting outcomes for different disciplines, indicating a gap in existing research. It would thus be valuable to explore differences in outcome, looking at grades across various subjects, that specifically target between discipline and curriculum variation.

In addition, questions remain regarding the variance in Helen, Mary and Cathy’s perceptions of administrative support. This perhaps indicates a necessity for further research specifically targeting actual levels of administrative support, both from the teachers’ perspective, as well as by the administrators’ own account. Lewis and Cheng’s (2006) research revealed that student success was impacted by administrators’ expectations of their success and so, given that de-streaming initiatives are facilitated by teachers with the support of administration, it is crucial that both maintain positive expectations for successful outcomes. Furthermore, it would be interesting to ascertain whether the program outcome would improve over time. Longitudinal studies could highlight whether or not improvements in pedagogical practice and delivery, as well as allotment of resources might lead to further improvement and success of the program, based on ongoing communication between teachers and administration and program evaluation.
5.5 Concluding Comments

The data indicates that there are three key areas that impact the successful outcome of a de-streaming initiative based on the perceptions of three in-service teachers at a TDSB secondary school, located in a neighbourhood mainly characterized by a low socioeconomic status. These main categories include the beneficial impact of belonging to a positive learning community created within a de-streamed classroom, the importance of administrative and leadership support and communication, as well as the impact of positive teacher attitude towards de-streaming.

Given that teacher attitude is significant, it is apparent that prior to implementation of de-streaming it would be pertinent to provide teachers with appropriate training, access to additional resources and to monitor their perceived progress with the initiative through ongoing communication between administration and teachers.

All three teachers in this study maintain a positive attitude with regards to the potential success of de-streaming initiatives, as well as the possibility for successful student outcomes, even though they did not all currently experience high levels of achievement for all students.

Previous research has shed light on the inequities that exist within the educational system, and specifically within the TDSB itself (Clandfield et al., 2014; Parekh, Killoran & Crawford, 2011). Racialized minority students and students from families of lower socio-economic status are still at risk for not completing high school. This inequity of access represents a major social injustice, especially given the widely accepted view that “advanced formal education is an essential ingredient for the future well-being of our society” (Clandfield et. al., 2014). De-streaming can provide equitable access to high standards of education for all,
by providing all students with the same academic curriculum. Since it allows previously lower performing students access to the positive influence of their higher performing peers, as well as the ability to avoid the detrimental impact of negative labelling, it is clearly important to continue to strive towards creating a learning environment that will lead to the best outcomes for all students. The continued dedication of each of the teachers involved, regardless of the challenges, is indicative of a persistent sense of hope that de-streaming can lead to beneficial outcomes for all students. All three teachers interviewed remained deeply committed to equity for all students and to the initiative itself. As Cathy states, “it can work-- given that certain things can be met”, and so administrators and school boards need to effectively communicate with in-service teachers to best determine those requirements for success, and in order to continue to improve the program, and provide equal access for all students to the highest level of education possible.
References


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APPENDIX A: Consent Letter

Date:

Dear ______________________________,

My Name is Patricia Fogliato and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on issues surrounding de-streaming initiatives in the Toronto District School Board. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have been or are currently involved in de-streamed classroom instruction. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor, Angela MacDonald. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.
Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Patricia Fogliato

Ph: 416-737-3805

patricia.fogliato@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Angela MacDonald

Contact Info:

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Patricia Fogliato and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) ______________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn your experiences with de-streaming for the purpose of learning about best practices with regards to instruction in de-streamed classrooms. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your teaching experiences. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. Where have you taught and for how long?

2. Describe your experiences teaching in a streamed environment.

3. How many de-streamed classes have you previously taught? Can you give me detailed descriptions of what these classroom situations and students were like?

4. By whom were these teaching placements assigned?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

5. How do you feel about de-streaming in general?

6. How would you describe its benefits to students? Can you provide specific examples?
7. How would you describe its drawbacks to students? Can you provide specific examples?

8. How do you feel about teaching a classroom of students with varied ability and academic performance levels?

Teacher Practices

9. How were your planning strategies and instructional practice different than if the class were streamed?

10. (If prior experience) Describe instances where implementation needed to be handled differently. Were you satisfied with the way you handled it?

11. (If no prior experience) How do you expect to have to handle implementation differently?

12. How do you expect/were learning goals altered in a de-streamed classroom environment?

13. How did you change assessment practices in a de-streamed classroom?

15. What kinds of resources would/did you utilize to address the needs of a de-streamed class?

16. How did the heterogeneous environment hinder or promote student learning?

Supports and Challenges

17. How did you feel you were/will be supported by parents?

18. How did you feel you were/will be supported by the administration?

19. What were/are some of the challenges faced in a de-streamed learning environment that you feel you could have avoided and how? As far as you know, does this coincide with the experiences of other teachers you know?

20. What advice would you give to a teacher who is about to teach in a de-streamed environment for the first time?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.