

What Causes Homelessness

There are many reasons why people become homeless. The lack of education is one of these reasons. But what causes lack of education? Again, there are many reasons but this is my question. Does the “self-fulfilling prophecy” increase the likelihood of a person becoming homeless because of “curriculum differentiation”, also known as tracking, used by the U.S. Department of Education?

The intent of this questionnaire is to examine and evaluate how the negative effects of tracking may have, inadvertently, contributed to the widespread problem of homelessness in America today. The question is how can the long term psychological effects on a young student, because of tracking, be linked to a possible future of homelessness. Apparently there has been little or no research that establishes a clear connection between these two experiences.

There is considerable controversy over whether tracking has any negative affects at all. That is about as much as the Dept. of Education is willing to say about this problem. Do poor self- esteem issues influence a child’s decision making later in life as an adult? There certainly is evidence of this. Are some U.S. school children being groomed, because of tracking, for success while others are doomed to failure and if so, how?

Human beings are very impressionable, especially at a young age. These early impressions affect the way we think, feel, and behave throughout our entire life time. We have a strong tendency to act on what we believe to be true or perceive to be true, regardless of the actual truth. If a child is taught to believe that he or she is not as good as other children, for whatever reason, then this will become the perception they have of themselves. Many children will resign themselves to this lowered self image (negative stereotyping effect) and begin to act accordingly (self-fulfilling prophecy). As inappropriate or misbehavior

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increases the more the negative stereotype is justified and reinforced (teacher expectancy effect).

Research on tracking indicates that students in higher tracks receive positive effects but that lower-track students suffer negative effects (Lucas 1999; Owens 1998; etc.). This type of discrimination often occurs on such a subtle level that the teachers often do not even realize they are doing it (Rosenthal, Jacobson 1968).

In what ways can the tracking and labeling effect, the stereotyping threat effect, the teacher expectancy effect, and the self-fulfilling prophecy influence students not only on academic performance and testing, but also in decision making throughout their life course? Many studies have revealed that student test scores and performance are influenced, in both positive and negative ways, by tracking and labeling. However, there are more questions than answers on what the long term effects are.

In a report by the National Center for Educational Statistics, "Tracking has been a fundamental aspect of education in this country since the early part of this century, when public schools devised a system of curriculum tracks in order to accommodate the diverse group of students attending school for the first time. **Recently, tracking has generated a large volume of research and policy analysis. 'There has been much debate over whether or not tracking creates unequal quality in educational experiences and later opportunity** (Oakes, Garnoran, and Page 1991). There is also **concern about whether tracking perpetuates, rather than alleviates, differences in children created by socioeconomic stratification (Oakes 1992).** This issue has been particularly relevant for educators and researchers concerned about equal access to education by minority students who, in racially integrated schools, are disproportionately represented in curricula designed for low-ability or non-college-bound students (Garnoran and Mare 1989)."

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ability courses, and otherwise reproduces the socioeconomic inequities and racial differentiation already present in the larger society (Oakes 1992).”

Since there is no clear consensus as to exactly what are the long term negative effects of tracking I decided to compare the percentage of high school drop-outs to statistics on the homelessness. I based this on the assumption that students placed in the lower tracks would be more likely to drop out of high school, experience poverty, and become homeless at some point in their lives. This assumption is not meant to imply that everyone who drops out of high school will become homeless. It just increases the vulnerability to circumstances that can lead to homelessness.

An Equation of the Sequence of Events:

Lower Track > Lowered Self- Esteem = Feelings of Failure > Drops Out of High School > Lowered Earnings = Increased Chance of Poverty > Increased Chance of Homelessness.

Before we try to answer these questions we should first look some of the statistics and definitions of homelessness. These figures are difficult to calculate because there is no accurate method of counting people who do not have a home or permanent address. Even the U.S. Census Bureau does not gather information or keep data on the homeless. A homeless person, as defined in the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or their primary residence is one of the following:

- A temporary place for people about to be institutionalized;
- Any place not meant for regular sleeping accommodation by humans;
- A supervised temporary shelter.

There are, however, many organizations that are gathering data, starting on the local level, then county, regional, state, national and world wide. One such group, the National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonpartisan, mission-driven organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States. According to their estimate, “Over the course of a year, between

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2.5 and 3.5 million people will live either on the streets or in an emergency shelter.”

So how does this coincide with the drop out rate of high school students? I was unable to find any actual statistics on the percentage of homeless people who do not have a high school diploma so I decided to compare whatever data I was able to find.

By comparing the high school dropout rate based on ethnicity to that of the homeless I found some similarities but no direct correlation. The dropout rate for Afro- Americans is about twice that of whites (22% to 12%). The homeless ratio of Afro-Americans to whites is not quite that much (49% to 35%). However, the dropout rates for Hispanics is much higher (35%) than either but the homeless rate is much lower (14%). This discrepancy may be a result in reporting because of cultural differences, such as high mobility, and may not reflect actual figures.

By comparing the dropout rate based on family income to the poverty level I found more similarities. About 15% of the students from low-income families dropped out of high school in 1980. Twenty-five years later, in 2005, approximately 13% of the U.S. population was living in poverty (this figure includes children). There does seem to be some correlation but this is probably just coincidence. It does, I think, demonstrate that there may some connection but that much more research is needed.

Another aspect of this equation is what kind of self-esteem issues do homeless people have. Sisters of the Road, a local homeless advocacy group, recently published a book, “Voices from the Street”, in which there are some references to this. “The common disenfranchisement from the larger society they shared was core... They find they have more in common with these other people who are down and out; the very ones society has said are not worth anything. They felt forgotten or overlooked by society at large. The U.S. has its own caste system.”

I cannot help but wonder how many of these feelings may have originated in the classroom because of curricular differentiation. These thoughts seem to

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mirror feelings that a young student in the lower track and not doing very well in school might experience.

Another example of this is in an article printed by the Oregonian on Tuesday, October 16, 2007. It is titled 'Homeless Women Learn to Trust Stylist', by Margie Boule. "These women have grown up being told they will never amount to anything. "You're stupid, you're slow, and you're ugly..." When people have grown up this way they give up on themselves."

Some questions for a survey on curriculum differentiation as a possible cause of the homeless problem. My proposed survey questions are based on student's memories of actual occurrences of favoritism, discrimination, or abuse and/or the memories of perceived such occurrences.

Survey questions:

1. Was school a good experience or bad experience for you?
2. Did you graduate from high school? Drop out? G.E.D.?
3. Were some students, individuals or groups, given more attention or treated better by your teachers than other students were?
Some examples of this could be boys vs. girls, blacks vs. whites, or wealthy vs. poor.
4. Were you, or any other students in your school, ever verbally abused? Physically abused? Emotionally abused?
5. Did you have any kind of disability? If so, what kind?
6. Did you get help from your teacher? Always? Sometimes? Rarely?

Proposed Response:

What can be done to reverse the long term negative effects of tracking?

1. Realize that many decisions made throughout our lives may have origins in self- perceptions we developed as children in school (looking-glass effect).
2. Become involved in activities that improve self-esteem.

Conclusion:

Traditionally, children were taught values, passed on from generation to generation that reaffirmed their cultural and social identity. This sense of identity would validate their feelings of self-worth as a member of that culture. The unique ways in which their ancestors dressed and the languages they spoke gave children a sense of belonging to a special group. These differences were traditionally cherished and cultivated pride and self-esteem.

In the current system of education being different can often have the opposite effect. Children are often singled out, ridiculed, chastised, and abused by other children for being different (looking-glass effect?). This happens not only because of cultural distinctions but also because of social-economical backgrounds. In other words; the unique differences that once gave a child a sense of belonging and self-esteem may now have become a liability. This child may not only be demoralized outside in the school yard (hidden curriculum?) but may also be at risk of being neglected in the class room because of a teachers prejudice (negative stereotyping effect). This prejudice, even inadvertently, can also extend to any other kind of physical, mental, or emotional difference or disability; including learning disabilities and/or appearance (over-weight, dirty or old clothing, etc.).

Without putting the blame on the Dept. of Education I think it is important to realize that it is not only what, but also the way we teach our children that will have life time consequences. If mistakes have been made then let's find out what they are and what we can do remedy them. If there are students who are falling through the cracks of higher education because of curriculum differentiation we should find ways to help them get back on the right track. We should not put these children on a low burner in the back of the classroom where they may eventually end up floundering on the outskirts of society.

References:

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U.S. Dept. of Education:

U.S Census Bureau:

The National Center for Educational Statistics:

National Alliance to End Homelessness:

National Coalition to End Homelessness:

Sisters of the Road:

The Oregonian:

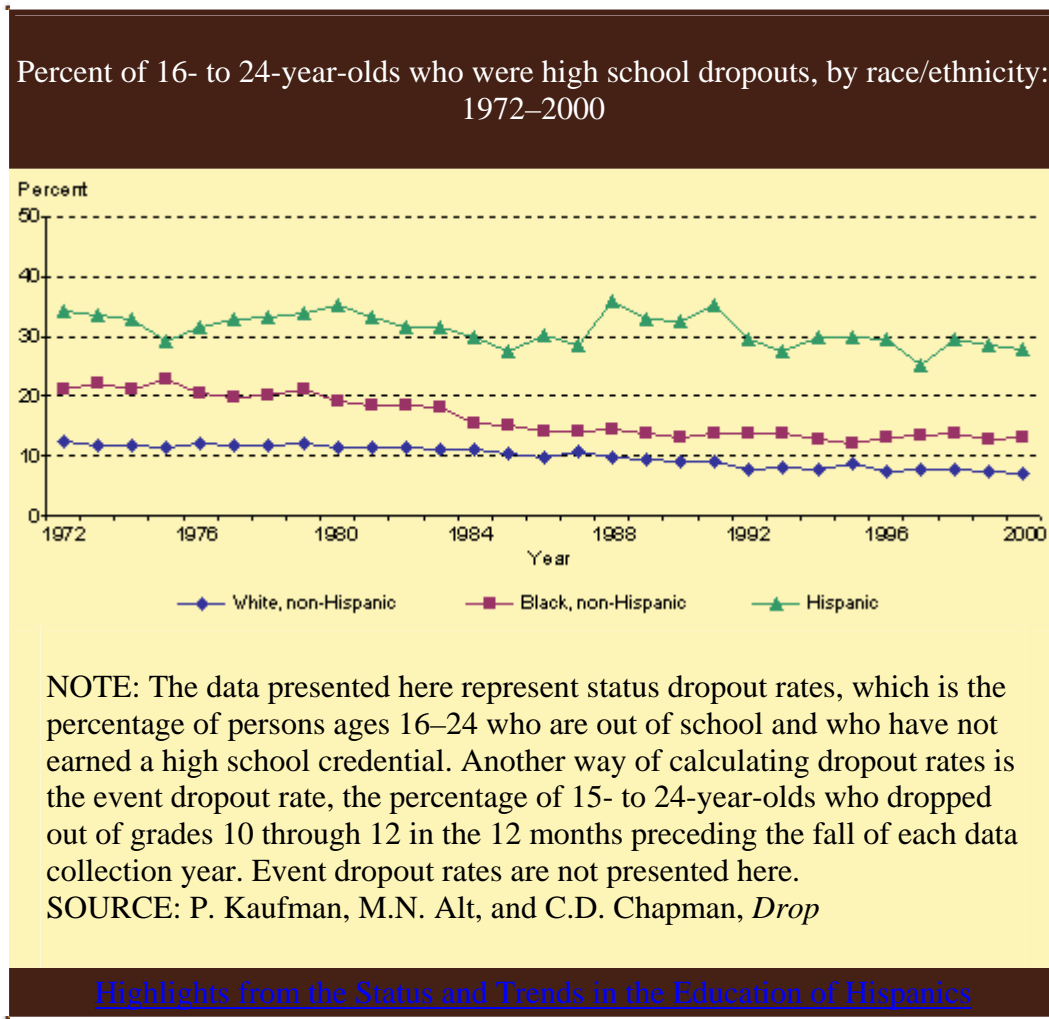
Listed below: Charts, Graphs, and Excerpts:

"Education can be the key to higher earnings, but it is even more importantly linked to the accumulation of assets. Research by Elena Gouskova and Frank Stafford of the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research shows that, on average, households headed by a high school graduate accumulate **ten times** more wealth than households headed by a high school dropout (Gouskova & Stafford, 2005). In other words, for every \$500 of wealth households headed by a high school dropout have, their peers with diplomas have accumulated approximately \$5,000."

"This issue with students dropping out of high school has to begin somewhere. Most everybody related to this trend has had a hand in its going wrong. Not surprisingly, nearly everybody is willing to point the finger, as long as it isn't pointed at themselves. **Even school administrators have a hard time admitting to the problem.** Lilly Rockwell, in the Washington General News talks about the problem: "Executive Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University Jay Smink said many teachers and administrators would have been less likely to say classes were boring, and more likely to blame students for not understanding the course work. 'I doubt if administrators would admit to school failure as accurately as the students portrayed it' Smink said" The

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students themselves are to blame as well, and their families don't help the situation. The blame should not exclusively ride on the parent's, students' and administrators' shoulders though."



NOTE: The event dropout rate indicates the percentage of youth ages 15 through 24 who dropped out of grades 10–12 in the 12 months between one October and the next (e.g., October 2002 to October 2003). Dropping out is defined as leaving school without a high school diploma or equivalent credential (for example, a General Education Development certificate). Low income is defined as the bottom 20 percent of all family incomes for the year; middle income is between 20 and 80 percent of

all family incomes; and high income is the top 20 percent of all family incomes. Data on family income are missing for 1974. Estimates beginning with 1987 reflect new editing procedures for cases with missing data on school enrollment items. Estimates beginning with 1992 reflect new wording of the educational attainment item. Estimates beginning with 1994 reflect changes due to newly instituted computer-assisted interviewing. For details about changes in CPS over time, please see [Kaufman, P., Alt, M., and Chapman, C. \(2004\). Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001 \(NCES 2005-046\).](#)

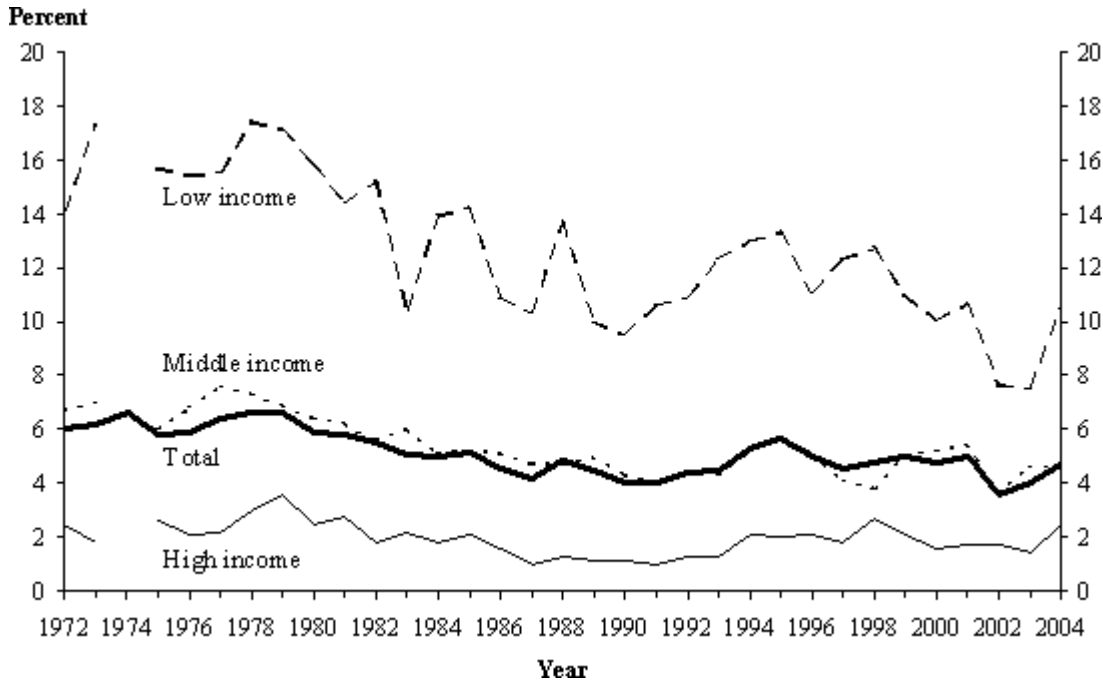
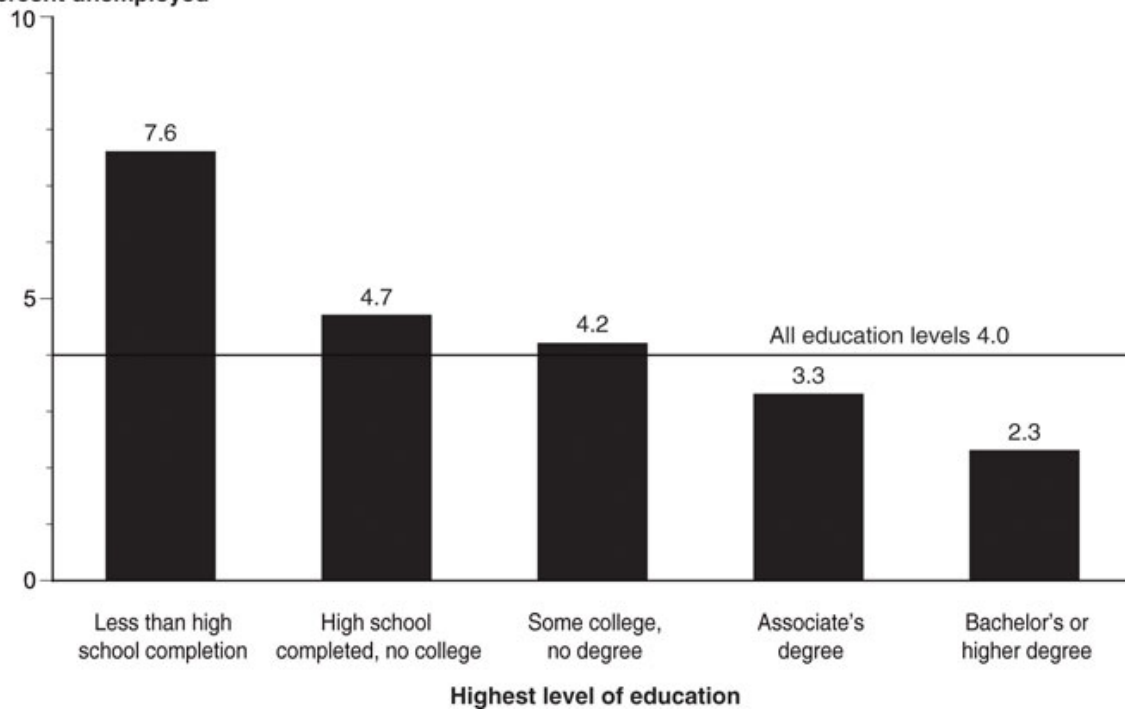


Figure 1. Event dropout rates of 15- through 24-year-olds who dropped out of grades 10–12, by family income: October 1972 through October 2004

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, [Current Population Survey](#) (CPS), October 1972–2004.



These are a few of many variations in reporting statistics on the homeless.

ETHNICITY

In its 2004 survey of 27 cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayor found that the **homeless population was 49% African-American, 35% Caucasian, 13% Hispanic, 2% Native American, and 1% Asian (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2001)**. Like the total U.S. population, the ethnic makeup of homeless populations varies according to geographic location. For example, people experiencing homelessness in rural areas are much more likely to be white; homelessness among Native Americans and migrant workers is also largely a rural phenomenon (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1996).

People remain homeless an average of eight months in the survey cities. Officials estimate that, on average, single men comprise 51 percent of the homeless population, families with children 30 percent, single women 17 percent and unaccompanied youth 2 percent. The homeless population is estimated to **be 42 percent African-American, 39 percent white, 13 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Native American and 2 percent Asian**. An average of 16 percent of

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homeless people is considered mentally ill; 26 percent are substance abusers. Thirteen percent are employed. Requests for assisted housing by low-income families and individuals increased in 86 percent of the cities during the last year.

POVERTY

Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. Poor people are frequently unable to pay for housing, food, childcare, health care, and education. Difficult choices must be made when limited resources cover only some of these necessities. Often it is housing, which absorbs a high proportion of income that must be dropped. Being poor means being an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets.

In 2005, 13.3% of the U.S. population, or 38,231,521 million people, lived in poverty. Both the poverty rate and the number of poor people have increased in recent years, up from 12.5% or 1.1 million in 2003 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005).

National Coalition for the Homeless

Curricular Differentiation in Public High Schools

American schools are faced with two difficult, competing tasks. First, they are required to provide equal educational opportunity for all students. At the same time, they are expected to offer a differentiated education to students so that differences in abilities, learning styles, and motivational levels can be accommodated. While proponents of curriculum differentiation, traditionally referred to as "tracking," see it as a necessary response to individual educational needs (Biemiller 1993), critics charge that it benefits only students assigned to high-ability courses, and otherwise reproduces the socioeconomic inequities and racial differentiation already present in the larger society (Oakes 1992).

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In order to fully document the magnitude of the effects of tracking on today's school children, it is important to go beyond what effects tracking can have, and determine how and to what degree tracking is actually being implemented in our schools.

Tracking has been a fundamental aspect of education in this country since the early part of this century, when public schools devised a system of curriculum tracks in order to accommodate the diverse group of students attending school for the first time. Recently, tracking has generated a large volume of research and policy analysis. "There has been much debate over whether or not tracking creates unequal quality in educational experiences and later opportunity (Oakes, Garnoran, and Page 1991). There is also concern about whether tracking perpetuates, rather than alleviates, differences in children created by socioeconomic stratification (Oakes 1992). This issue has been particularly relevant for educators and researchers concerned about equal access to education by minority students who, in racially integrated schools, are disproportionately represented in curricula designed for low-ability or non-college-bound students (Garnoran and Mare 1989).

Hundreds of research projects have studied tracking's effects in terms of student outcomes, such as standardized test scores (see Slav in 1990). Some researchers have conducted case studies or ethnographies of individual schools concerning how tracking is practiced (e.g., Valli 1990).

However, many of these studies are subject to mixed interpretations and leave many questions unanswered. In addition, a major weakness in this area of research is that little is known about the pervasiveness of tracking in our nation's schools, and the different ways tracking is being used across different school systems. Most researchers who study student tracking would agree that the policies and practices of curriculum differentiation are varied, although little is known about the degree of this variation across the nation. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to estimate the effects tracking policies and practices are actually having on the nation's children.

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This E.D. Tabs report contains tabular summaries based on data collected from the *Survey of High School curricular Options* for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Stepping Outside the Structure; Active and Critical Engagement

“To purposely go beyond the contemporary practices that currently order society, as seen by those who graduate and those who do not graduate, it is essential to engage in what I defined in an earlier work as a “pedagogy of process”; a continual and constant self-reflection of how one’s practices are embedded within the hegemonic agenda (Campbell-Disla, L., 2002). As Sardar (1999) notes, in a stratified, exclusive society where divisions and hierarchies have been constructed as “natural”, “essential” and “common-place”, it is difficult to create a program that escapes the divisions found in society. However, by engaging in “pedagogy of process”, I want to propose that educators, activists and researchers measure what it is that they are doing and investigate the legitimization and perpetuation of how their practices perpetuate inequalities, injustices and subordination. The importance and relevance of this framework will highlight the historical and social constructs of power, domination and exclusion. In using this framework, the goal for educators, activists and researchers is to step out of the current structure that maintains and perpetuates the injustice and to envision a practice that is inclusive, equitable and accessible. For instance, each and every action (i.e., policy, practice and discourse) contains both explicit and implicit values and assumptions as well as power dynamics, differentials and structures. It is necessary to explore the origins of the problem and to evaluate how...” author unknown