

The Equity Traps within Act 77

Flexible Pathways and Personalized Learning Plans



Planning for Personalization

"This is such an exciting step forward for our schools and students. We can't address challenges around engagement, relevance and student responsibility for learning without taking on this issue of personalization."

Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary of Education

In Vermont we are actively working as a state to adopt a number of exciting and meaningful school transformation initiatives. One of these involves creating Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) for each student, starting this year in the seventh grade, that will be a dynamic process to help guide students through multiple pathways towards their post-secondary aspirations.

PLPs are an opportunity to create an image of a student and their future by piecing together a mosaic of interest inventories and aptitude tests, the structured efforts of educators guiding students through advisories, post-secondary guidance counseling, family input, community

members as mentors, and most importantly the students' visions of themselves and their future aspirations.

PLPs have the potential to be an amazing tool to engage, inspire, and support all of Vermont's students. I strongly believe that this *is* the direction Vermont should head in transforming education. If, however, we head in this direction without being fully cognizant of the implications of **every individual involved in the PLP planning process bringing *unconscious* biases, perceptions, and expectations**, I fear that we as educators, and as a state, may fall into a series of Equity Traps.



Being unconscious of mental models is in fact only part of the problem. Worse yet, might be our *belief* that we are immune to these deeply embedded biases. **The research shows that not only are we unaware of our own biases, but "our conscious or stated attitudes may conflict with them."** This is suggested by data that shows, while we in Vermont make great outwardly efforts to be socially conscious and progressive around ensuring equity in guiding students towards post-secondary pathways, we may lag behind other states in the results our actual efforts.

Performance Data for CTE Concentrators	Vermont		Nat'l Avg.	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
% of CTE students from underrepresented gender who participated in program nontraditional for that gender	8%	20%	37%	37%
% of CTE students from underrepresented gender who completed a program nontraditional for that gender	5%	18%	38%	38%

If we do not accept this reality, we may be creating an academic planning process which *systemically* tracks students into pathways towards post-secondary aspirations which are based not only on *our* unconscious mental models and biases, but also misguided *student* self-assessments (*where perceptions of societal expectations of competence control for an individual's actual competence*), prejudiced gender-based *parental* expectations, *students'* own fixed-mindsets in relation to gender/racial/socioeconomic identity, and the very strong evidence of stereotyped guidance among *school counselors*.

Simply put, the elements and the planning processes which underpin PLPs are fraught with Equity Traps that could lead to the systemic integration of academic tracking and post-secondary counseling that is based on a student's gender/race/socioeconomic identity rather than their true potential, interests, abilities, and inherent aptitudes.

There are opportunities to overcome these Equity Traps. Two of which that have the greatest potential benefits are 1) educator training around our own mental models and unconscious biases and 2) around instilling growth mindsets and promoting self-esteem in students. The first of these could be supported through the [National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity \(NAPE\)](#) and the second through the work done with growth-mindset and social emotional learning by local organizations such as [Up for Learning](#).



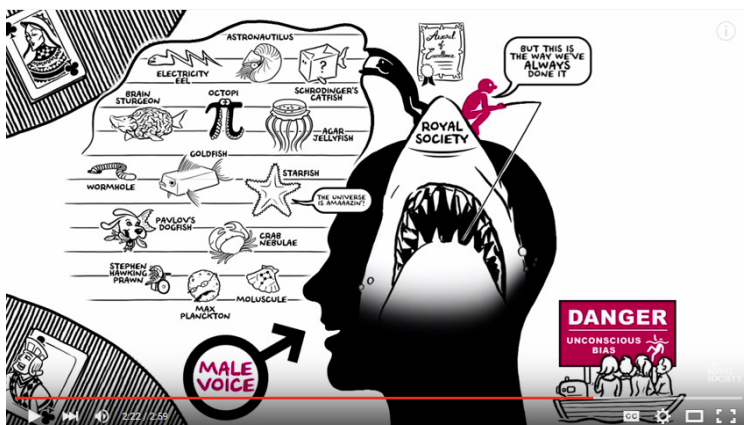
The Director of Special Projects at NAPE, Ben Williams, believes that educator professional development could help ameliorate these Equity Traps through a *"research-grounded process to assist educators in transforming their practice to increase the participation and persistence of students in nontraditional occupational programs and pathways. Through a process of examination, reflection, and action...prepare educators to reach, teach, and maximize the success of every student."*

The second is a piece, focused around **growth-mindsets and social-emotional learning, is one that many Vermont schools and educators are already addressing. Perhaps, however, educating students (and educators) about these areas should be the foundation for designing PLPs.** [Up for Learning](#) is doing tremendous work with Vermont students and teachers in the area of [mindset, metacognition, and motivation](#). On this topic they offer workshops where "school based youth-adult teams attend a full-day training where they learn concrete tools to **dispel the common myth that intelligence is fixed** and strategies to reinforce the theme, 'whether you think you can, or you can't, you are right' (Henry Ford)."

Helping students believe in themselves and their abilities, regardless of the beliefs of society or other individuals, is imperative to putting students on the pathway that is best for them.



It is a complicated issue, with no simple solution. But, even though "[we can't cure unconscious bias, with self-awareness we can address it.](#)" We need to be aware of these Equity Traps and *also* of the need to learn about how we as educators can best avoid them in the process of developing student pathways.



I have little doubt that my concerns will be questioned by those more educated and experienced in this area than I might be. I welcome it. **It is, in fact, my hope and intent that these concerns be questioned.** If we as a state are to successfully implement PLPs, in ways that allow for their full potential, we must at least consider the presence of Equity Traps in PLPs.

In sharing these concerns with members of the Rowland PLN, [Jeanie Phillips](#) had questions about what other educators might suggest we do, or are doing, to address bias and inequity in the PLP process. She wondered what role professional development could play in uncovering bias and making safe spaces for educators to talk about practices that contribute to

inequity. And, she believes we need to collectively consider what PLP best practices could eliminate, or at least reduce, implicit (and explicit) bias.

Take a few minutes, read the excerpts below (*or, take a few more to read the documents themselves*) and then consider what questions *you* have about the potential for Equity Traps in PLPs.

[Elementary School Teachers' Biases Discourage Girls From Math & Science](#)

The New York Times

"It goes a long way to showing it's not the students or the home, but the classroom teacher's behavior that explains part of the differences over time between boys and girls," said [Victor Lavy](#), an economist at University of Warwick in England and a co-author of the paper.

"The pipeline for women to enter math and science occupations narrows at many points between kindergarten and a career choice, but elementary school seems to be a critical juncture. Reversing bias among teachers could increase the number of women who enter fields like computer science and engineering..."

[Brain Shows Unconscious Prejudices](#)

"...finding reveals an unconscious feeling about women pursuing careers rather than staying at home. You'd think that would be strictly a male bias, but men and women show it equally. And to a startling degree. Eighty percent of test takers associate men with a 'work' category and women with a 'family' category."

HARVARD gazette

Another unexpected finding reveals an unconscious feeling about women pursuing careers rather than staying at home. You'd think that would be strictly a male bias, but men and women show it equally. And to a startling degree. Eighty percent of test takers associate men with a "work" category and women with a "family" category.

[On The Origins of Gender Human Capital Gaps: Short and Long Term Consequences of Teachers' Stereotypical Biases](#)

On The Origins of Gender Human Capital Gaps: Short and Long Term Consequences of Teachers' Stereotypical Biases¹

January 2015

Victor Lavy
University of Warwick, Hebrew University and NBER

Edith Sand
Bank of Israel

"...teachers' over-assessment of boys in a specific subject has a positive and significant effect on boys' overall future achievements in that subject while having a significant negative effect on girls. We also provide evidence that suggests spillover effects across biased behavior of teachers of different subjects can also impact students' achievements in other subjects."

Gender and the Career Choice Process: The Role of Biased Self-Assessments

“...cultural beliefs about gender differentially influence the early career-relevant decisions of men and women. **Cultural beliefs about gender are argued to bias individuals’ perceptions of their competence at various career-relevant tasks, controlling for actual ability.** To the extent that individuals then act on gender-differentiated perceptions when making career decisions, cultural beliefs about gender channel men and women in substantially different career directions.”



CHICAGO JOURNALS

Gender and the Career Choice Process: The Role of Biased Self-Assessments
Author(s): Shelley J. Correll
Source: *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 106, No. 6 (May 2001), pp. 1691-1730
Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/321299>
Accessed: 26/03/2014 17:50

Nurse or Mechanic? The Role of Parental Socialization and Children’s Personality in the Formation of Sex Typed Occupational Aspirations



Study investigates the role of parental socialization and children’s agency in the formation of sex-typed occupational preferences using data for children aged between 11 and 15. “*One interesting implication of this study is that **any action directed to increasing children’s motivation and self-esteem, if successful, is likely to reduce occupational sex-segregation in the future.***”

Department of Quantitative Social Science

Nurse or Mechanic? The Role of Parental Socialization and Children’s Personality in the Formation of Sex-Typed Occupational Aspirations

The Legal Implications of Gender Bias in Standardized Testing

“*Career interest inventories, which are widely used in the secondary schools for vocational education counseling and placement, also **result in substantial gender-based score differentials.***” “...numerous studies have found evidence of sex-stereotyped counseling in schools. A consistent and troubling finding has been that students who select nontraditional programs do not report receiving positive encouragement from guidance counselors in their choice.”

Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice

Volume 7 | Issue 1

Article 2

September 2013

The Legal Implications of Gender Bias in Standardized Testing

Katherine Connor

Ellen J. Vargyas

Five Stereotypes about Poor Families and Education



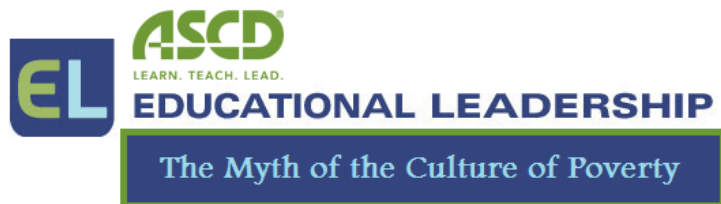
Answer Sheet

Five stereotypes about poor families and education

"...our understandings of and attitude about people in poverty, even if we don't believe we are applying them to individual students, have an effect on low-income students' school performance. Stereotypes and biases matter. They matter in an extremely practical and immediate way. And no amount of resources or pedagogical strategies will help us provide the best opportunity for low-income students to reach their full potentials as learners if we do not attend, first, to the stereotypes, biases, and assumptions we have about them and their families."

The Myth of the Culture of Poverty

"...we must consider how our own class biases affect our interactions with and expectations of our students. And then we must ask ourselves, Where, in reality, does the deficit lie? Does it lie in poor people, the most disenfranchised people among us? Does it lie in the education system itself?"



Equity & Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students & Schools



"Designing fair and inclusive education systems is a stepping stone to providing high quality education for every child. Inappropriate design and practices of education systems allow educational inequities..."

For Economic Growth, Invest in Women and Girls

"Vermont Works for Women published a report on what young Vermont women say about how well-equipped they feel for the challenges of school, work, career, and economic independence as adults." These 210 Vermont women, ages 15 to 25, shared "they lacked exposure to careers that might be of interest. They didn't know about careers that might lead to financial independence."





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"At the Randolph Technical Career Center (RTCC) I help students to become post-secondary ready through work-based learning experiences which build confidence through competence, promote a sense of pride in work well done, and foster the development of the perseverance necessary to manage obstacles while valuing the effort it takes to turn challenges into opportunities."