Work 1: Educational Theory Analysis

Publisher: EPSY 408 SP20 EdD
Start: Jan 15, 2020
Due: Feb 23, 2020

Project Description

Topic: Take one of the theories or theoretical concepts introduced in this course. Look ahead into the course learning module to get a sense of upcoming ideas—don't feel constrained to explore concepts introduced early in the course. Or explore a related theory or concept of your own choosing that is relevant to the course themes.

Convey in your introduction how your topic aligns with the course themes and your experience and interests. Outline the theory or define the concept referring to the theoretical and research literature and illustrate the significance of the theory using examples of this concept at work in pedagogical practice, supported by scholarly sources.

For Doctoral Students: Theoretical and Empirical Literature Review: Work 1 must be in the genre of a literature review with at least 10 scholarly sources. For specific details, refer to the Literature Review Guidelines provided later in this document.

Word length: at least 2000 words

Media: Include images, diagrams, infographics, tables, embedded videos, (either uploaded into CGScholar, or embedded from other sites), web links, PDFs, datasets or other digital media. Be sure to caption media sources and connect them explicitly with the text, with an introduction before and discussion afterwards.

References: Include a References "element" or section with at least five (ten for doctoral students) scholarly articles or books that you have used and referred to in the text, plus any other necessary or relevant references, including websites and media.

Rubric: Use the 'Knowledge Process Rubric' against which others will review your work, and against which you will do your self-review at the completion of your final draft.

Important Note: The First Draft means a complete first version of your Work!

The Pros and Cons of Ability Grouping in K-12

Does it hinder or help?

Paquita Reedy

Feb 19, 2020 at 5:15 PM

Abstract

This literature review is intended to provide evidence of the pros and cons of ability grouping. Ability grouping is the separation of students into small groups which is dependent upon their academic abilities. It has been a debated topic for many years as students, parents, teachers, and administrators provide the foundations of support and opposition of its use.

Overview

Ability grouping has been an important topic of debate for over a century. In fact, it's one of the most controversial topics in both elementary and secondary schools. The resurgence of the practice has brought many interested stakeholders to a head. This method of teaching and learning typically takes place in an elementary classroom. Students are most often placed in homogeneity groups based on a certain criterion. That criteria can be scores from state assessments, in-house school assessments, or summative assessments created by the teacher. The system includes the teacher providing instruction to one group while this other group of students work independently. The independent student groups engage in cooperative activities, computer instruction, or completing worksheets to reinforce skills (Loveless, 2013). The teacher rotates amongst the groups so that each is provided with teacher-led instruction. The instructional method might be different, but the objective is the same.

Figure 1

Reading Grade 4
**Basis for Reading Instructional Groups**
(percent of students)

Table
2-1

Year	Ability	Other	Not Created
2009	71	21	8
2007	64	20	15
2005	59	22	19
2003	47	25	27
2000	39	29	32
1998	28	33	39

Note: The category "other" is a collapsed variable comprising responses for "interest," "diversity," and "other." For 1998-2000 and 2009, NAEP question T068301; For 2003-2007, NAEP question T068351.

Source: "NAEP Data Explorer," National Center for Education Statistics, http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreport-card/naepdata/.

Figure 1 shows an increase in ability grouping from 1998 to 2008. It increased from 28% to 71%. Ability grouping is thought to teach at a level that is not too difficult nor too easy for every student. According to Bolick and Rogowsky (2016), "Teachers engage in this classroom organizational strategy with the purpose of meeting individual learners' needs, improving student learning, and increasing test scores." While ability grouping is supported as a means to meet the needs of every student, ability grouping isn't supported 100 percent. What exactly is ability grouping and why isn't it supported across the board? In this video, popular pros and cons are explained. In addition, the video details the differences between the type of ability grouping, streaming or setting. Streaming ability groups are consistent throughout all subject areas. Setting ability groups are varied depending on core subjects, such as math and English.
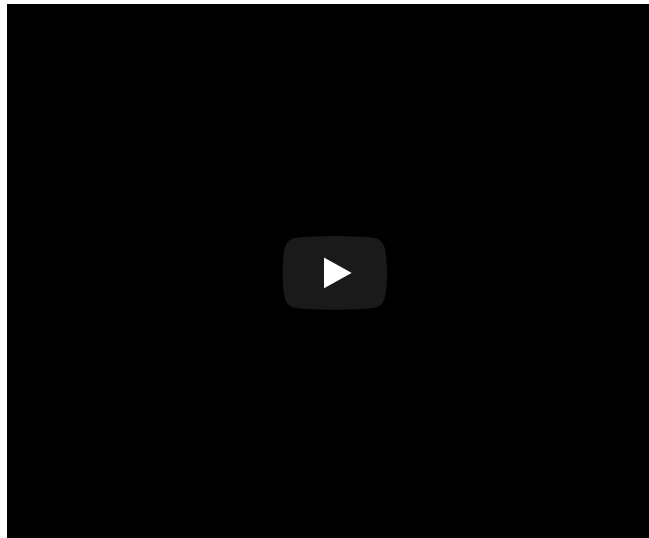
Media embedded February 16, 2020

Personal Background

As a teacher certified in elementary and secondary education, I have utilized the ability grouping method in my classroom, both brick and mortar and online. While working in brick and mortar in a Title 1 school, I taught approximately 26 fourth graders each year. During my last year of brick and mortar instruction, my students' reading levels varied from first grade to eighth grade. During reading, we had 15-minute whole group instruction followed by small group instruction using ability grouping. This was required by administration. Currently, I teach high school CTE classes and a reading intervention class. Typically, our reading and math classes are divided into ability groups labeled below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. This is determined by in-house testing that we administer every quarter. Each ability grouping level receives 45 minutes of instruction as a whole group with varying number of days a week. For example, a student who is advanced only attends class 2 days a week compared to a below basic student, who attends 4. In addition, a student is referred to reading intervention if they score at below basic or do not take the test. Ability grouping changes per quarter if growth is shown.

Research Questions

There are several questions that guided the research on the affects of ability grouping on learning:

1. What is ability grouping?
2. What are the pros and cons of ability grouping?
3. Do the pros outweigh the cons?
4. How has the reemergence of ability grouping increase mastery?

Pros of Ability Grouping

Ability grouping is supported by many students, parents, teachers and administrators. Many believe that it is the best approach to educating a classroom with a diverse set of academic abilities. Students and parents benefit from a teaching environment where students of the same academic abilities are place together. It provides the notion that the students in the classroom are receiving the appropriate information, at the appropriate instructional level. Teachers and administrators are required to participate in many hours of professional development to acquire different, proven methods of instruction for children with varying abilities within the same setting. For them, ability grouping, whether small groups within one classroom or grouping each class by skills, is often the solution. With the need for differentiation in the classroom, ability grouping can resolve the problem of catering to students at all different levels of learning. Typically, the subjects that utilizes ability grouping are math, reading, and language arts.

Ability grouping addresses the need of every educational level, including gifted.

Grouping student with similar skills and abilities allow each student to receive instruction at their academic level. One example of elementary levels is basic, average, and advanced. In secondary, it can be basic, honors, and college prep. It's all a matter of scoring, schools, and district preferences. However, once a student reaches secondary grades, it is often referred to as tracking.

Ability grouping targets instructional needs.

Ability grouping is constructed to target the specific needs of each academic level. It is meant to support and challenge all students no matter their level of academic ability. For example, gifted or advance students achieve higher levels of learning when they participate in ability grouping, pull-out services, separate classes, or different schools (Jarosewich 2006). Students that are at lower levels benefit from instruction that targets their specific level and challenges them with attainable goals. This is differentiated instruction at its best.

Ability grouping is flexible.

Ability grouping allows for purposeful and flexible grouping of students in varying academic levels. Teachers and administrators can group students on a temporary basis while allowing for changes based on growth or decline. Teachers are able to use different assessments to categorize students based on academic levels, learning styles, student engagement, and demonstrated learning. If needed, student can be rearranged based on those categorize to better utilize the system.

Setting up small groups require pre-planning. These small groups are divided by ability and instruction is differentiated. The groups are pre-determined by a specified test score, either by state, by school, or by teacher. Classroom management comes into play when setting up small groups as there should be rules in place. Small groups require students to work independently more often than teacher-led. This video

Cons of Ability Grouping

Although there are many supporters of ability grouping, there are also students, parents, teachers, and administrators who oppose the use of ability grouping. Many view it as discrimination. According to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, if a school receives federal funding, Title VI prohibits discrimination through the use of ability grouping. Historically, ability grouping has been used to bypass desegregation laws. While teachers and administrators frown upon the time commitment required to teach several different lessons for varies abilities.

Ability grouping places a negative label on student groups.

One argument states that ability grouping label students as underachievers. This leads to stimulation deprivation, low expectations, and lower quality of teacher-led instruction than students considered high-achievers (Hollifield, 1987). Unfortunately, that student's label may follow him/her into secondary education, and lead to tracking.

Ability grouping prohibits growth and movement.

Many against ability grouping believe that once a student is assigned to a group, they become stagnant and are unable to advance. Being in a low-level group decreases effort and motivation because of peer effects and stigma (as cited in Sorensen et al., 1987). No growth equals an exacerbated achievement gap. When a student knows that they are not performing as their peers, they make less of an effort because they know their results will not mimic their peers. In addition, the curriculum may be different based on the group's ability. Therefore, testing these students without a modification would skew the test results (Schofield, 2010). In support of social cognitivism theory, many believe having a variety of educational levels in one setting supports an individual acquiring knowledge just by observing others (Bandura, 1989).
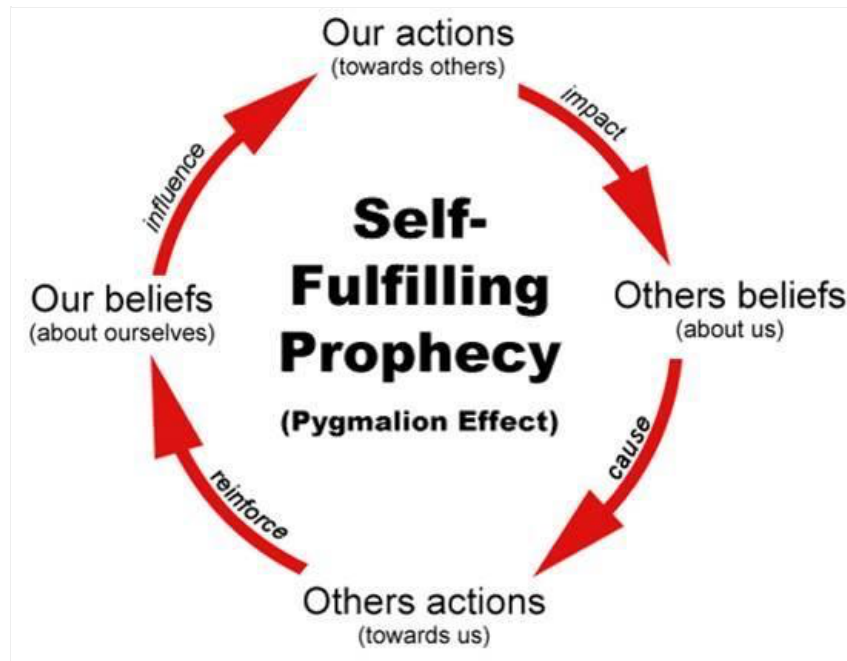
(Figure 2.)

Figure 2: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy developed by Merton 1968

Ability grouping creates more work for teachers.

Ability grouping also creates more work for overloaded teachers. In some instances, groups require multiple types of teaching strategies. A strategy that works for a student in a higher level may not have the same outcome for a lower level student. For example, the use of manipulatives in math instruction may not be used for a student who has already mastered that particular standard. Instead of developing one lesson, there are multiples needed. For reading, an ability group might require the use of choral reading on a lower level fiction text, but another group may require a chapter book. The different strategies equal more planning and preparation for teachers. View the video below that details what exactly is required to set up small groups with differentiated instruction.
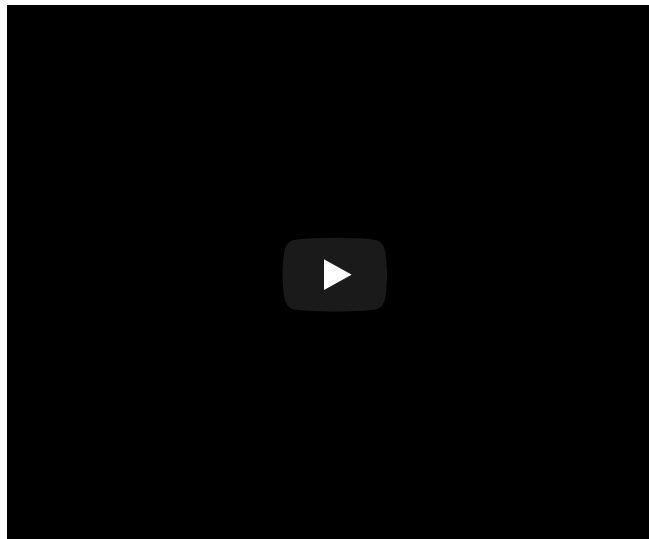
Media embedded February 16, 2020

Synthesis of Research

Research from Gamoran in Educational Leadership (1992) suggests that ability grouping doesn't increase overall achievement. The results actually show educational opportunities as inequitable. There is more to consider than grouping students by ability levels. Administration must consider the teacher's instruction ability. Gamoran believes that whether the groups are heterogeneous or homogeneous, the instructional method will be effective if the instruction is indeed effective (1992).

Many stakeholders fear the progression of ability grouping transitioning to ability tracking. The major differences between the two grouping methods:

- Ability grouping is used in elementary education. Students are placed in small groups within their class based on their academic ability.
- Ability tracking is used in secondary education. Students are grouped academically by their classes. Instruction is received as a whole group, not several small groups.

Tracking leads to students being categorized as academic, general, or vocational students. Those particular labels bring into question inequality. Two suggestions may improve the use of grouping. Grouping should not be used as an umbrella method. Every student group doesn't required grouping. It should be on an as-needed basis. Secondly, when grouping is used, it should be developed fully. Resources should be allocated to ensures there is suffecent time and materials needed to ensure successful small group instruction.

In secondary education, case studies suggest that low level classes may serve as remedial but the follow conditions should still apply.

1. *Teachers should hold high expectations, manifested by their emphasis on academic work.*
2. *Teachers exert extra effort, compared to their efforts in other classes.*
3. *Teachers and students have opportunities for extensive oral interaction.*
4. *There is no procedure in place that assigns weak or less experienced teachers to the lower track (qtd. by Gamoran, 1992).*

Tracking vs Grouping

Ability grouping allows for focused instruction. It enables the teacher to instruct at a slower place, use additional learning materials, provide more repetition and enforcement (Hopkins, 2006). Those imitate ideal instructional situations until it's compared to a higher level group, which has been given assignments that require the use of higher-thinking skills in relation to their peers. Then, it becomes a sense of inequality. Hopkins quoted several grouping plans created by Robert E. Slavin that may result in an increase in student achievement.

1. Students should be grouped heterogeneously throughout most of the day but regrouped by ability in one or two classes.
2. Group all classes heterogeneously except reading.
3. Non-graded instruction should be grouped by ability.
4. Use in-class grouping (or small groups) for math to create instruction within instruction (2006).

Presentation for tracking and ability grouping in K-12 (Shaw, 2016)

https://prezi.com/jpjk8l2dt0gs/tracking-and-ability-grouping-in-k-12-education/
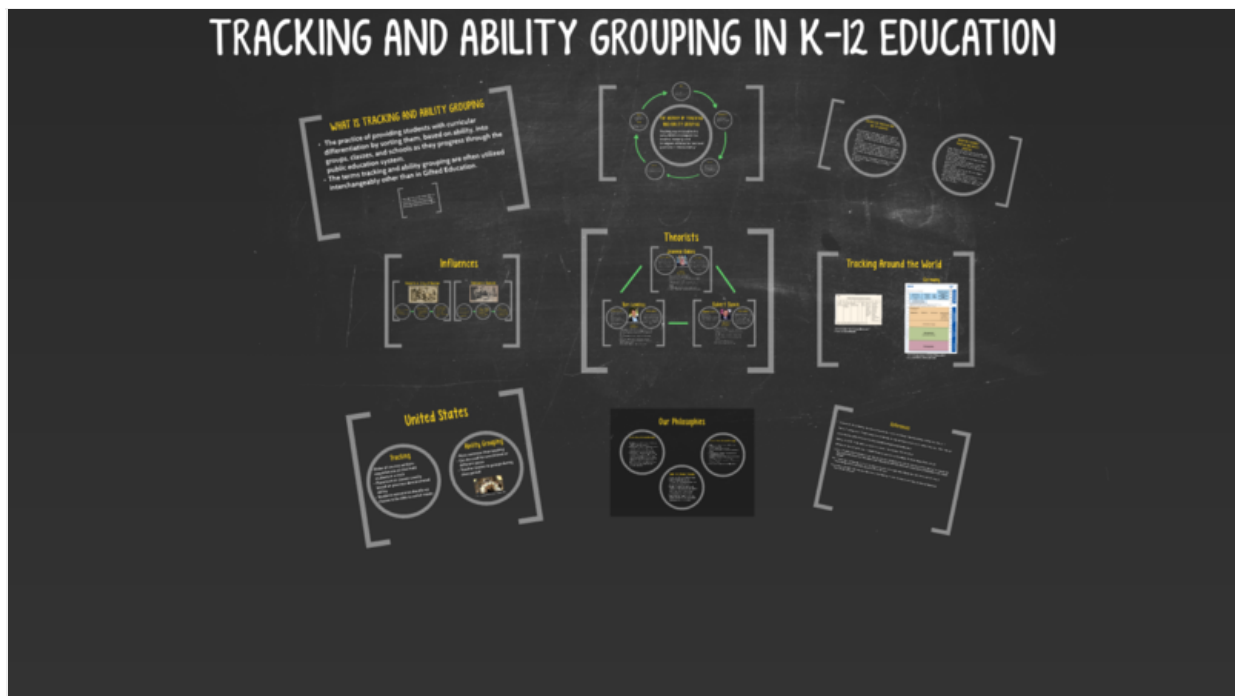
According to Slavin's (1987) research, "Ability grouping is maximally effective when done for only one or two subjects, with students remaining in heterogeneous classes most of the day; when it greatly reduces student heterogeneity in a specific skill; when group assignments are frequently reassessed; and when teachers vary the level and pace of instruction according to students' needs." For that reason, ability grouping is usually only utilized in core classes, such as math and English.

Controversy

In the 1970s and 1980s, ability grouping was a symbol of segregation. Grouping students by ability coincided with separation by characteristics such as race, ethnicity, native language, and class (Loveless, 2013). As a result, low level students, which happen to be minorities, were funneled into vocational and remedial educational tracks that weren't beneficial to the student.

According to Loveless' (2013) quote of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis,

"…the practice is undergirded by normative beliefs regarding race and class—and politically defended by white, middle-class parents to protect privilege. Black, Hispanic and poor children populate remedial classes; middle-class white children populate honors courses. Tracking and ability grouping are not mere bystanders to social injustice. Such practices don't just mirror the inequalities of the broader society. They reproduce and perpetuate inequality."

Although these ability groups are developed using a student's perceived intellect, socioeconomic status and/or ethnic groups play a role in student placement (Schofield, 2010). There is a gap in research in effectiveness of ability group with minority students.

Conclusion

Ability grouping's primary objective is to meet the needs of every single student. The premise of "meeting the student where they are" is at the forefront of this instructional method. Instruction is geared towards focused instruction in a very small group. Students are provided with level-appropriate tools that reinforce and challenge, but at their level. Many times, teachers sway towards teaching to the middle scoring range. The only students that benefit from this method are middle students. Lower students struggle with the curriculum, while higher level students breeze through it. The intentions are honorable, but the process is stigmatized (Yee, 2013). Even with a substantial increase in the practice, it is important to analyze the pros and cons and adjust to fit the situation. Education is not one size fits all.

References

(2014). Self-Fulfilling Prophecy [digital image]. Retrieved from baruch.cuny.edu/overcomingadversity/learn/vicious-and-virtuous-cycles/emotional/self-fullfilling_prophecy-2/

Ability Grouping in Education. (n.d.). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ee0TqG0Hxg

Bandura, A. (1989). Social Cognitive Theory. Annals of Child Development, 6, 1–60. Retrieved from https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/Bandura1989ACD.pdf

Bolick, K. N., & Rogowsky, B. A. (2016). Ability Grouping is on the Rise, but Should It Be? Journal of Education and Human Development, 5(2). https://doi.org/10.15640/jehd.v5n2a6

Gamoran, A. (1992). Synthesis of Research / Is Ability Grouping Equitable? Educational Leadership, 50(2), 11–17. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct92/vol50/num02/Synthesis-of-Research-~-Is-Ability-Grouping-Equitable¢.aspx

Hollifield, J. (1987). Educational Options" Ability Grouping. Retrieved January 30, 2020, from https://www.davidsongifted.org/search-database/entry/a10618

Hopkins, G. (2009, February 24). Is Ability Grouping the Way to Go -- Or Should It Go Away? Education World. Retrieved from https://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin009.shtml

Jarosewich, T. (2006, June 1). Ability Grouping and Gifted Children. Retrieved January 30, 2020, from http://www.davidsongifted.org/search-database/entry/a10715

Loveless, T. (2013). How Well Are American Students Learning? The 2013 Brown Center Report on American Education, 3(2), 12–21.

Schofield, J. W. (2010). International Evidence on Ability Grouping With Curriculum Differentiation and the Achievement Gap in Secondary Schools. Teacher's College Record, 112(5), 1492-1528. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Janet_Schofield/publication/268269754_International_Evidence_on_Ability_Grouping_With_Curriculum_Differentiation_and_the_Achievement_Gap_in_Sec

Shaw, J. (2016, February 19). Ability Grouping [Image].

Slavin, R. E. (1987). Ability Grouping and Student Achievement in Elementary Schools: A Best-Evidence Synthesis. Review of Educational Research, 57(3), 293-336. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543057003293

SmartatMath. (2013, June 3). Effective Small Group Differentiated Instruction [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AF3T2aZM3ko

Sørensen, A., & Hallinan, M. (1986). Effects of Ability Grouping on Growth in Academic Achievement. American Educational Research Journal, 23(4), 519-542. Retrieved February 3, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/1163088

Yee, V. (2013, June 9). Grouping Students by Ability Regains Favor in Classroom. New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/10/education/grouping-students-by-ability-regains-favor-with-educators.html

- Paquita Reedy