

What Educators Need to Know About Ability Grouping

Del Siegle - Editor

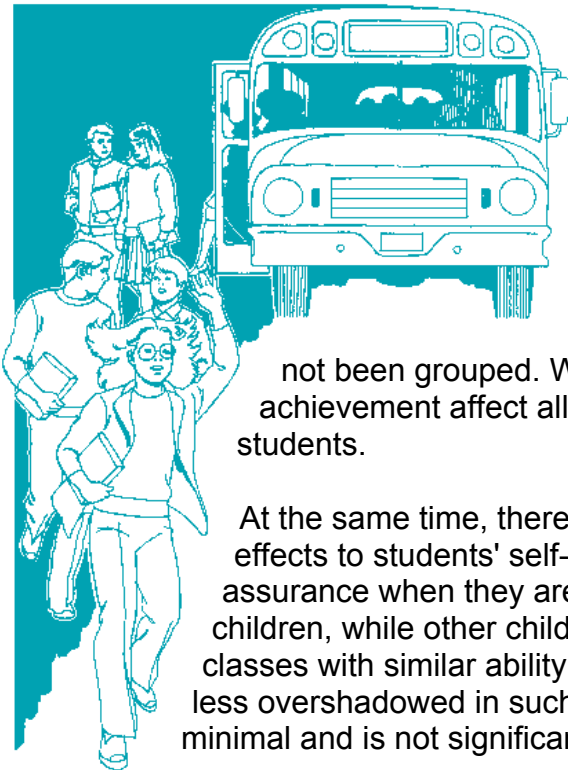
Practitioners' Guide - A9201

Ability grouping is one of the most hotly debated issues in educational circles. Karen Rogers and James Kulik have surveyed over half a century of research on the grouping issue. The information presented is based on their findings.

Implications for the Classroom

All children do not learn in the same way and at the same pace. Instruction must be modified for students who already know the material or are capable of learning the

material more quickly. There are a variety of instructional strategies which can be utilized to meet student needs. Grouping students within the classroom is one method.



Traditionally, elementary teachers have placed students in groups for reading and math instruction. In fact, research shows that over the span of a school year students in ability groups achieve more than students who have not been grouped. When instruction is modified, advances in achievement affect all student groups, not just the high ability students.

At the same time, there is little research evidence to support negative effects to students' self-esteem. Brighter children lose some of their self-assurance when they are placed in classes with equally talented children, while other children gain in confidence when they are taught in classes with similar ability learners. They may feel less overwhelmed and less overshadowed in such classes. The slight loss to bright students is minimal and is not significant.

Grouping and Tracking Are Not the Same

While tracking restricts access to educational opportunities, grouping strategies increase educational opportunities by enabling teachers to provide tailored instruction. With flexible grouping, students are free to move according to their abilities and interests.

Grouping Alone Does Not Ensure Appropriate Instruction

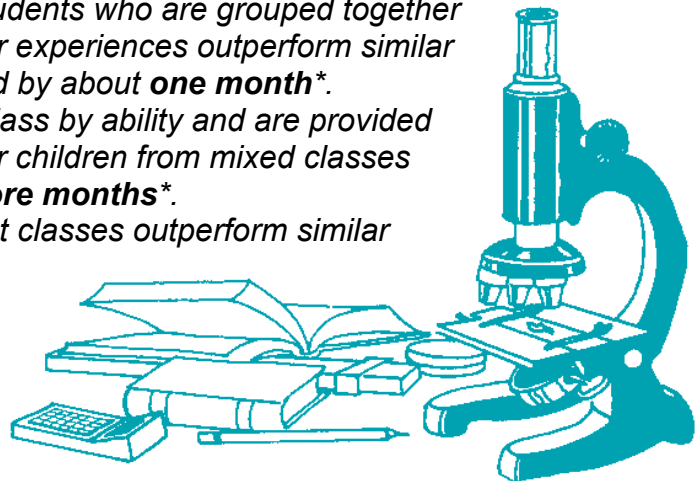
The accumulating research evidence on grouping appears at times to be contradictory. The key to interpreting the studies lies in what happens within the groups. It is not the grouping of students that makes the difference; it is the instructional and educational activities provided. Simply placing students in groups without adjusting instruction and content has little impact. Accordingly, teachers need to adjust the curriculum to match the capabilities of students.

Grouping Can be Organized in a Variety of Ways

Grouping students according to ability is not the only option. Students can be placed in groups according to interests or motivation to work on areas of common interest. Groups can also be formed to utilize the variety of student strengths needed to accomplish a common project or goal.

Research Facts

- *Over one school year, high ability students who are grouped together but do not receive modified curricular experiences outperform similar students who have not been grouped by about **one month****.
- *Children who are grouped within a class by ability and are provided tailored instruction outperform similar children from mixed classes who are not grouped by **three or more months****.
- *High ability students from enrichment classes outperform similar students from conventional classes by **four to five months****.
- *Talented students from accelerated classes outperform students of the same age and IQ who have not been accelerated by almost **one full year****.
- *Students who are not in high ability groups are not harmed academically by ability grouping and may gain academic ground in some cases.*
- *Ability grouping does not have negative effects on student self-esteem and appears to be slightly positive for lower achieving students.*



*Achievement is beyond normal expectations for one school year and is measured on grade-equivalent scales of standardized achievement tests.

References

- Rogers, K. B. (1991). *The relationship of grouping practices to the education of the gifted and talented learner* (RMBD9102). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.
- Kulik, J. A. (1992). *An analysis of the research on ability grouping: Historical and contemporary perspectives* (RMBD9204). Storrs, CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.

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The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented
2131 Hillside Road, Unit 3007
Storrs, CT 06269-3007
Tel: (860) 486-4826 Fax: (860) 486-2900
Web: <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt>