

Topic
School Choice

I. Introduction

A. What is school choice?

1. Parents choose where kids go. "The belief was ... superior product." (Matland, 1995)
2. Most common- Choose school not in their neighborhood. (Ravitch & Viteritti, 1996)
 - a. Want a school to fit their child's "talents and interests." (Martinez, 1995)
 - b. Educational quality and discipline. (Martinez, 1995)
3. Unlimited Choice- "Unlimited ... educational institutions." (Bhagavan, 1996)
4. Charter School- A private group runs school and has a contract to meet performance goals. (Ravitch & Viteritti, 1996)

B. Questions I wanted to answer.

1. How does school choice affect the curriculum?
2. How does it affect transportation?
3. How does it affect students' learning?
4. Does the state government have any regulations?

II. What I found out. The school system I studied.

A. The Curriculum

1. Schools offer something special. (Principal Craig, MacArthur)
 - a. MacArthur- Natural sciences and environment
 - b. Glens Valley- Globalism
 - c. Burkhardt- The Arts
 - d. Southport- Geography and environment
 - a Mary Bryan- Math
2. Add lessons, projects, clubs, and field trips. (Ruth Morgan, parent)
3. Special teachers for the special subjects. (Mrs. Meyer, Mary Bryan)

B. Transportation

1. Special buses. Aaron is picked up at 6:55 am. (Ruth Morgan)
2. Parents who arrange transportation make sure kids do well because they are going to a lot of trouble getting them to this school. (Hill, 1996)
3. Parents must pick kids up after extracurricular activities. (Mrs. Meyer)

C. Students' Learning

1. Do well because they want their parents to be proud of them and the school they chose. (Hill, 1996)
2. Some choice kids are there because they had discipline problems at another school. The act up making it harder for others to pay attention and learn. Larger classes. (Mrs. Meyer)

D. The Government

1. Legislation is very hard to get off the ground. It is still a very controversial idea. (State Representative Bruce Munson)
2. Indiana has done a few charter schools. (Bruce Munson)

3. Minnesota first statewide program started in 1985. (Ravitch & Viteritti, 1996)

III. Conclusion

A. Pros

1. Parents have more control over their child's education. (Ruth Morgan)
2. Voucher systems give low-income families a choice too rather than just the rich who can afford private schools.
3. Parents become more involved. (Martinez, 1995)
4. Students see adults working together and see that performance is important in life. (Hill, 1996)
5. Teachers are motivated to do a good job of keeping their school open. (Hill, 1996)

B. Cons

1. Private schools have the right to reject applications. (Witte, 1995)
2. Many of the parents who actually participate are already highly educated and have a high SES. (Matland, 1995)
3. Parents with limited education are not capable of evaluating the schools and making a wise choice. (Martinez, 1995)
4. Many of those who take advantage of the voucher program are already enrolled in private schools. (Matland, 1995)
5. Some feel unlimited choice violates separation of church and state.

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Interviews

- Mrs. Joanne Brown, geography teacher- Southport High School.
- Mr. Craig, principal - MacArthur Elementary School.
- Mrs. Sue Meyer, music teacher- Mary Bryan Elementary School.
- Mrs. Ruth Morgan, parent- Southport Elementary School.
- Mr. Bruce Munson, State Representative.

Topic
Ability Grouping

I. Introduction - Why I chose this topic:

- A. I knew just a little about the topic.
 - 1. I know it's controversial.
 - 2. I am concerned about students' welfare.
- B. My son's teacher recommended that he be tested for ADD.
 - 1. I wondered if ADD children were placed in low ability groups.
 - 2. If so, I wondered if they could ever move to higher groups.

II. Questions I wanted answered:

- A. What types of ability grouping exist?
- B. What criteria are used for group placement?
- C. What are the benefits versus the detriments of ability grouping?
- D. What hope do low ability group students have of moving to a higher group?
- E. What effect can ability grouping potentially have on students' futures?

III. What ability grouping is:

- A. Definitions - taken from book, *Educational Psychology*, by Paul Eggen and Don Kauchak, p. 156-8, and journal article, "Ability Grouping and Student Achievement in Elementary Schools: A Best-Evidence Synthesis, by Robert E. Slavin. (see handout)
- B. History of ability grouping:
 - 1. It has been used since the turn of the century. (article, "On the Wrong Track," p. 47, by Susan Black)
 - 2. Desegregation led to the creation of additional ability groups. (article, "Does Ability Grouping do More Harm Than Good?, by Leanne Lucas and Brenda Mitchell)
 - 3. Immigration increase caused schools to reorganize in order to accommodate those children. (Black, p. 47)
 - 4. The United States' philosophy is that natural ability, rather than effort, explains achievement. (Commission on the skills of the American workforce, 1990)
 - 5. The needs of society and the economy were met by curriculum tracking at one time so that some went into the work force right away and some to college. (article, "Ability Grouping, Aspirations, and Attainments," by Jomills Braddock II and Marvin P. Dawkins, p. 334)
- C. Criteria used for placement
 - 1. What - previous school grades, cumulative records, recommendations from former teachers (including school psychologists, counselors, and reading and math specialists), and scores on standardized achievement or aptitude tests.
 - 2. When - within-class grouping uses testing during the first few weeks of schools. (Black, p. 48)

IV. The Argument for and Against Ability Grouping:

- A. For (Black, p. 47-8)
 - 1. Pupils progress at their own rate according to their own abilities.
 - 2. Teachers can adapt instruction to the needs of the group.
 - 3. Fewer students fail.

4. Students maintain their interest and incentive to learn.
5. Slower pupils have more opportunities to participate.
6. There are fewer discipline problems.
7. Teachers can individualize instruction for slower students.

B. Against

1. Students in low groups lose their motivation - why try if you don't have the ability? (Black, p. 47-8)
2. Students in low ability groups are denied equal instruction.
3. It unfairly sorts students for subsequent social and economic roles.
4. Tracking leads to different curricular goals and lower expectations for students, which impacts self-esteem and achievement. (article, "Flexible Grouping: Why and How," by Jeanne R. Paratore, p. 6)
5. Teachers tend to have lower expectations for students in low ability groups. (article, "What Research Says to the Middle Level Practitioner," by J.H. Johnston and Glenn C. Markel, p. 57)
6. Students in low ability groups tend to be less attentive and more easily distracted by peers. (Johnston, p. 57-8)
7. Lower track classrooms are usually assigned the least experienced teachers; senior teachers choose higher tracks. (Braddock, p. 325)

C. Court Rulings (equity issues regarding ability grouping):

Because more minority children were in lower ability groups, the defending districts had to prove that the students were receiving instruction superior to what they would have received without ability grouping.

1. A comparison of 2 court rulings (article, "How Should We Group to Achieve Excellence with Equity?" by Bonnie Grossen, p. 2)
2. Summary:
 - a.. Tracking was found "inequitable" in that it used one generic score to make a permanent placement with no opportunity for lower group students to move up.
 - b. The flexible achievement groups were considered "equitable" since they provided more resources for teaching children in lower groups.

D. Research Shows:

1. The premise is: "If the effects of ability grouping on student achievement are zero, then there is little reason to maintain the practice..." (article, "Ability Grouping and Student Achievement in Elementary Schools: A Best-evidence Synthesis," by Robert E. Slavin)
2. A Comparison of 4 actual research reports: the control group in the first two is the heterogeneous classroom. A positive effect implies greater learning in an ability-grouped plan; a negative value indicates an advantage for the control group.
 - a. Ability-grouped class assignment - Table I
 - 1) Shows zero student achievement
 - 2) No gifted or special education programs represented
 - b. Kulik and J.A. Kulik's (1984) research on ability grouping Table 2
 - 1) The group evaluated was mostly a special program for the gifted, not ability-grouped class assignment.
 - 2) The grouping used was heterogeneous classes with re-grouping only for math or

reading.

- 3) The results showed in favor of the re-grouping (5 out of 7).
- c. The Joplin Plan - Between- versus within-class grouping - Table 3
 - 1) The control group was the within-class grouping.
 - 2) Result: Joplin classes achieved more than within-class reading groups in 11 out of 14 studies, with 3 showing no difference.
 - 3) Achievement was higher for both high and low groups.
- d. Within-class grouping vs. whole class instruction - Table 4
 - 1) Most grouping done for math, some reading - only done for upper elementary grades, not primary
 - 2) Result: Every subgroup showed increased achievement in within-class ability grouping. Low achievers showed the largest increase, then high achievers, then average ones. (Slavin, p. 302-18)
3. More research needs to be done. (article, "Ability Group Effects: Instructional, Social, or Institutional?" by Karl L. Alexander, p. 44)
 - a. "We need direct measures of differences in the quality and quantity of instruction that occurs in different ability groups."
 - b. "We also need better information on how the advantages and disadvantages of ability-group placement are transmitted from grade to grade."

V. A Comparison of 3 School Systems - Elementary and Middle Schools

- A. Differences/similarities in grouping methods
- B. Criteria used:
 1. Standardized tests, especially for special education or gifted students
 2. Reading and math testing at beginning of year by teachers
- C. Potential of movement between groups

VI. What Effect Ability Grouping Can Have on Students' Futures:

- A. Possible Negative Effects (note: both have to do with tracking)
 1. One study showed that by the end of 10th grade, low-track students are at least 12% more likely to drop out than students in higher tracks. (Black, p.49)
 2. If lower track students do not drop out, their skills may be so inadequate and emotional damage severe enough that postsecondary education and employment opportunities are drastically reduced, say The Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990.
- B. Positive Effects
 1. Students achieve more, according to research, with the right type of grouping, which leads to increased chances of success.
 2. Students are able to compete more on an international level with their peers, especially honors students.

VII. My Conclusion From Research

- A. All grouping methods are not alike - research results varied by method.
- B. Some grouping may be necessary. "I have not found a better way to meet the needs of individual students than to ability group for reading (within-class)." (Mrs. Schnuck)
 1. It may depend on school administration. "We [teachers] just do what they tell us to." (Mrs.

Banker)

2. It depends on your students. "Last year I had to group; this year I'm not because my students are all at about the same level for reading." (Mrs. Sutherland)
- C. The main goal is to find the best way to meet the needs of each student.
- D. How we group determines whether students are affected positively or negatively.
 1. Elements of effective grouping plans (Slavin, p. 328):
 - a. Students' primary identification and time should be spent in heterogeneous classes and be regrouped by ability only in certain subjects (i.e. math, reading).
 - b. "Grouping plans should reduce student heterogeneity in the specific skill being taught, not just in I.Q. or overall achievement."
 - c. "Grouping plans should frequently reassess student placements and should be flexible enough to allow for easy reassignments after initial placement."
 - d. "Teachers should vary their level and pace of instruction to correspond to students' levels of readiness and learning rates in regrouped classes."
 - e. "In within-class ability grouping, numbers of groups should be kept small to allow for adequate direct instruction from the teacher for each group."
 2. Ways to reduce negative effects of grouping (Eggen, p. 160):
 - a. "Keep group composition flexible and reassign students to other groups when their rate of learning warrants it."
 - b. "Make every effort to ensure that the quality of instruction is as high for low-ability students as it is for high-ability students."
 - c. "Treat student characteristics as dynamic rather than static; teach low-ability students appropriate learning strategies and behaviors."
 - d. "Avoid assigning negative labels to lower groups."
 - e. "Constantly be aware of the possible negative consequences of ability grouping."

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