

# *Grouping Practices*

## **Javits Study: Grouping Practices for the Gifted (Synthesis of research)**

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Date (mm/dd/yy): // Title: Body: The following summary is a synthesis of 13 research studies pertaining to grouping practices for gifted students. The study was supported under the Javits Act Program as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

### Ability Grouping for Enrichment

Across the five meta-analyses (Kulik & Kulik, 1982, 1984, 1990; Kulik, 1985; Vaughn, 1990), the two best-evidence syntheses (Slavin, 1987, 1990) and one ethnographic/survey research synthesis (Gamoran & Berends, 1987), the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. While full-time ability grouping (tracking) for regular instruction makes no discernible difference in the academic achievement of average and low ability students (Slavin, 1987, 1990; Kulik & Kulik, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1990), it does produce substantial academic gains for gifted students enrolled full-time in special programs for the gifted and talented (Kulik & Kulik, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1990; Vaughn, 1990).
2. High ability student groups have more extensive plans to attend college are more likely to enroll in college, but the research has not been able to substantiate that this is directly influenced by grouping (Gamoran & Berends, 1987). Likewise, research has not been able to substantiate that there are marked differences in the quality of teachers who work with high ability students or in the instructional strategies and learning time apportioned in such classes. It is probable that the substantial gains in achievement reported for gifted and talented students in 6 of the 8 research syntheses is produced by the interaction of greater degrees of learning potential, teacher who are interested in their students and in their subject, and the willingness of gifted students to learn while in a classroom with other interested, high ability learners.
3. Ability grouping for enrichment, especially when enrichment is part of a within class ability grouping practice or as a pullout program, produces substantial academic gains in general achievement, critical thinking, and creativity for the gifted and talented learner (Vaughn, 1990).
4. Ability grouping, whether for regular instruction or enrichment purposes, has little impact on gifted students' self-esteem. When full-time grouping is initiated, there is a slight decrease in esteem, but in special programs for gifted students, there are no changes in self-esteem (Kulik & Kulik, 1984, 1990). Enrichment

pullout programs show only a small but positive increase in self-esteem (Vaughn, 1990).

5. Ability grouping for the gifted produces a moderate improvement in attitude toward the subjects in which students are grouped. A moderate improvement in attitude toward subject has been found for all ability levels when homogeneously grouped on a full-time basis (Kulik & Kulik, 1982, 1990).

6. Ability grouping is not synonymous with "tracking" (Slavin, 1987, 1990). It may take many forms beneficial to gifted learners, including full-time enrollment in special programs or classrooms for the gifted, regrouping for special subject instruction, cross-grade grouping for specific subjects or for the entire school curriculum, pullout groups for enrichment, and within class ability grouping, as well as cluster grouping (Kulik & Kulik, 1990). The major benefit of each grouping strategy for students who are gifted and talented is its provision of the format for enriching or accelerating the curriculum they are offered (Kulik & Kulik, 1990). It is unlikely that grouping itself causes academic gains; rather, what goes on in the group does.

#### Cooperative Learning for Regular Instruction

1. Cooperative learning in mixed-ability groups for regular instruction cannot be shown to be academically beneficial for gifted and talented learners. Likewise, there is no research below the college level to support cooperative learning in like-ability groups for gifted students (Robinson, 1990).

2. Although there is some evidence to support sizable academic effects for those forms of cooperative learning that incorporate individual task accountability (Slavin, 1990), little research has been reported which would allow this to be extrapolated to the gifted population.

3. Although there is some evidence to support sizable affective outcomes for mixed ability cooperative learning, particularly for the acceptance of culturally diverse and academically handicapped students (Johnson, Johnson & Maruyama, 1983; Slavin, 1990), no research has been reported which would allow this to be extrapolated to the gifted population (Robinson, 1990).

#### Grouping for Acceleration

1. Grouping for the acceleration of curriculum for gifted students produces substantial academic gains for the forms of Nongraded Classrooms, Curriculum Compression (Compacting), Grade Telescoping (Rapid Progression at Junior or Senior High), Subject Acceleration, and Early Admission to College. Advanced Placement programs were found to produce moderate, nearly significant academic gains as well (Rogers, 1991).

2. Those forms of acceleration for which groups of gifted learners may be involved do not appear to have a direct impact on self-esteem, either positively or

negatively (Kulik & Kulik, 1984; Rogers, 1991). It is apparent that a host of other environmental, personological, and academic variables are more directly involved with changes in self-esteem.

#### Recommendations for Practices Involving Ability Grouping

Based on conclusions drawn from the research syntheses, the following guidelines are offered for educators who are considering various grouping options for gifted students.

**GUIDELINE ONE:** Students who are academically or intellectually gifted and talented should spend the majority of their school day with others of similar abilities and interests.

Discussion: What forms this option may take are open: Both general intellectual ability grouping programs (such as School Within a School, Gifted Magnet Schools, Full-time Gifted Programs, or Gifted Classrooms) and full-time grouping for special academic ability (such as Magnet Schools) have produced marked academic achievement gains as well as moderate increases in attitude toward the subjects in which these students are grouped.

**GUIDELINE TWO:** The Cluster Grouping of a small number of students, either intellectually gifted or gifted in a similar academic domain, within an otherwise heterogeneously grouped classroom can be considered when schools cannot support a full-time gifted program (either demographically, economically, or philosophically).

Discussion: The "Cluster Teacher" must, however, be sufficiently trained to work with gifted student, must be given adequate preparation time and must be willing to devote a proportionate amount of classroom time to the direct provision of learning experiences for the cluster group.

**GUIDELINE THREE:** In the absence of full-time gifted program enrollment, gifted and talented students might be offered specific group instruction across grade levels, according to their individual knowledge acquisition in school subjects, either in conjunction with cluster grouping or in its stead.

Discussion: This "cross grade grouping" option has been found effective for the gifted and talented in both single subject and full-time programming (i.e., Nongraded Classrooms).

**GUIDELINE FOUR:** Students who are gifted and talented should be given experiences involving a variety of appropriate acceleration-based options, which may be offered to gifted students as a group or on an individual basis.

Discussion: It is, of course, important to consider the social and psychological adjustment of each student for whom such options are being considered as well as cognitive capabilities in making the optimal match to the student's needs.

**GUIDELINE FIVE:** Students who are gifted and talented should be given experiences which involve various forms of enrichment that extend the regular school curriculum, leading to the more complete development of concepts, principles, and generalizations.

Discussion: This enrichment could be provided within the classroom through numerous curriculum delivery models currently used in the field, or in the form of enrichment pullout programs.

**GUIDELINE SIX:** Mixed-ability Cooperative Learning should be used sparingly for students who are gifted and talented, perhaps only for social skills development programs.

Discussion: Until evidence is accumulated that this form of Cooperative Learning provides academic outcomes similar or superior to the various forms of ability grouping, it is important to continue with the grouping practices that are supported by research.

