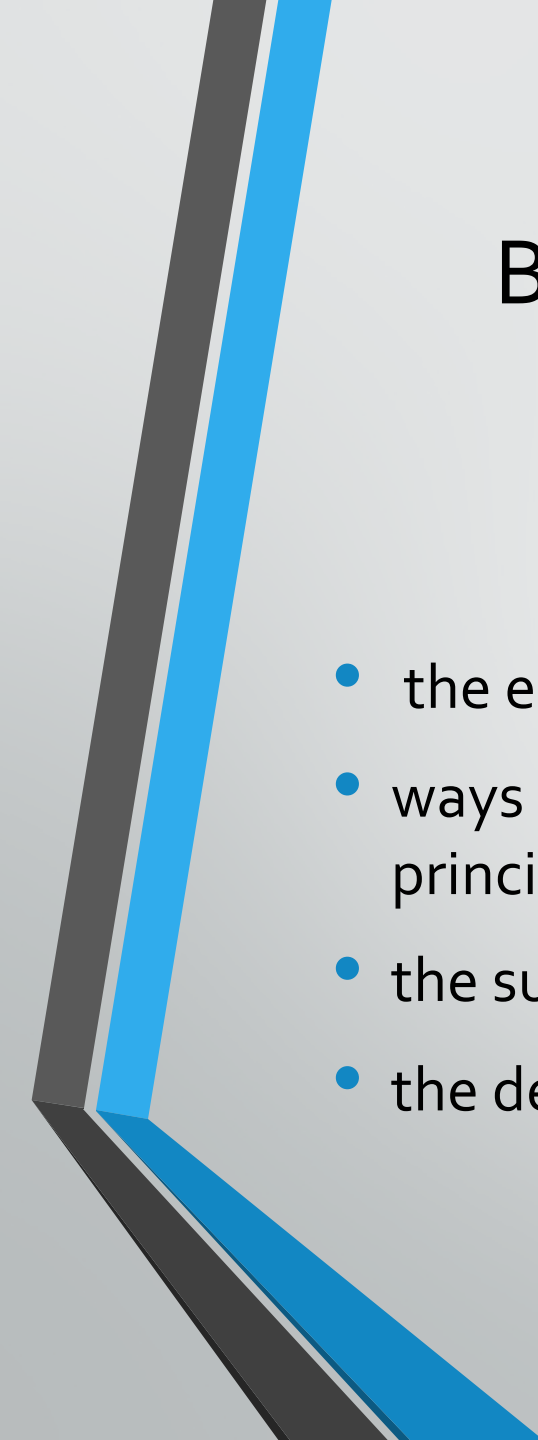




Mentors as Expert Colleagues

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By the end of this presentation, we will have explored...

- the engagement of teacher mentors in theoretical concepts
- ways of building on this theoretical knowledge and reviewing pedagogical principles
- the support of mentors' own professional development
- the development of their student teachers' professional learning needs

Methodology

- A small-scale inquiry with qualitative data
- An exploratory approach to data collection
- Three Focus Group Meetings in one academic year on zoom, one hour each, using 10 recommendations for researchers (Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel and Cook 2020)
- Audio recorded conversations for analysis in accordance with security advice (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey and Lawless 2019)

Participants

- 2 HE Researchers who identified an area for development (Differentiation)
- Initial survey to gauge interest sent to 40 schools
- 13 respondents but 7 teachers eventually took part
- Mentors in ML departments from different schools, different stages of their career and different backgrounds

Rationale

‘finding a theorist who makes explicit something you’ve been sensing or who states publicly what you’ve suspected privately but felt unable to express is wonderfully affirming’
(Brookfield 2017 p.75)

- To explore the notion of professional learning
- The importance of connecting research to practice
- How best to engage teacher mentors in the process
- The use of theory can either contradict or reaffirm teachers’ beliefs



Reasons for Professional Development

- Externally driven factors (SLT, Ofsted Inspections, DfE Policy)
- Accountability or Performance related activities
- Teacher Agency

Professional Development

Externally Driven CPD


- SLT driven Inset: Ofsted inspections and latest Government policies
- CPD done 'on teachers' as opposed to professional learning done 'with them' by (Cooper et al. 2020 p. 572)
- Mentors: DfE driven curriculum, CCF and Science of Cognitive Learning Theory
- 'consumers of others' knowledge and ideas' is limiting (Cooper et al. 2020, p.558)

Professional Development Accountability

- Performance related initiatives
- Pressure for student results
- Data tick boxes

lead to...

- difficulty for teachers to find their distinctive self
- diminished capacity to reflect on ability as a teacher
- the erosion of teachers' autonomy, identity and creativity (Murphy et al. 2020)



Professional Development Teacher agency

- Ownership and Choice
- Knowledge of own context, own students and oneself
- Valued by the academic world of research
- Teacher Voice and Participant in research
- SLT to assist and encourage culture of research activity

Working in tandem

- Teacher Mentors and Researchers
- Shared Practical Knowledge and Theoretical Knowledge
- Equal status through structured learning conversations (Brown, 2017)
- Discussions and explanations about theory and methods
- Think differently about what we do and the decisions we take (Winkler, 2001)
- Reducing the Theory-Practice Gap (Loughran, 2007)



The practicalities

- Time and Space
- Building Relationships
- A Shared Understanding
- Creating new meanings

A model for reflective practice

- Brookfield's 4 lens model
 1. Through the autobiographical lens
 2. Through the student's eyes
 3. Through colleagues' experiences
 4. Through theoretical literature

The Process

- Understanding theories of learning - Reading and Reflecting
- Establishing a Learning Community: Focus Group Meetings - discuss and analyse
- Applying theories to own context and determining which approaches to take
- Evaluating impact on their pupils' progress
- Discussing and modelling these for their student teachers

The Process

Understanding theories of learning - Reading and Reflecting

- *'...because I am trying to do a little bit of reading around this, so if you can point us in the direction of maybe the latest research, blogs, anything that is new, I would be very happy to do the reading myself'* (Teacher 4)
- 7 readings shared over 5 months
- Mentors articulating ideas from readings to share with their student teachers
- An article by Bromley (2019) prompted discussion of 'teaching to the top instead of offering different levels of tasks to choose from' (Teacher 4)



The Process

Understanding theories of learning - Reading and Reflecting

- Time to read
- Summarising or chunking the reading (Brown, 2017)

Summary of article by Angela Lui (2012) *Teaching in the Zone*

Lui's article provides an introduction to working within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), based on Vygotsky's theory of social development (1987) i.e. aiming to build on what individual students already know and to take them just beyond this. She considers how to understand each student's ZPD and to use this to plan more targeted learning for the whole class, small groups and individuals.

She feels it is important to know what a child's ZPD is in order for them to make effective progress. She believes there is no point in teaching children at the level they are already at since this does not create a challenge for them and to teach beyond what they are capable of will lead to demotivation.

The key to achieving good progress is to make use of interaction with others, to scaffold the learning, to assess and to give feedback.

Lui's top tips for working within the ZPD are to:

Include clear goals and objectives (success criteria that are understood by all and include the students in the process through cognitive and metacognitive questioning)

Use available space and appropriate resources (a little more difficult during the Covid Pandemic)

Involve movement around the classroom (teacher to circulate and facilitate and redirect)

Include a range of individual, small group and whole group instruction.

Promote and encourage inquiries and discussions (Darling, Hammond & Bransford. 2006)

Carry out individual assessments to identify what each child can do independently.

On page 6 of the article she provides an excellent checklist for testing out if you are teaching in the ZPD. We aim to provide student teachers with a worked example of what this might look like and will ask them to create their own.

On page 8 of the article she has produced guidelines for using multiple methods and tools in the ZPD-centred classroom.

Questions for reflection:

Could you use the checklist on page 6 to examine whether you are teaching in the ZPD based on a unit of work?

Might you use the guidelines on page 8 to reflect on which methods and tools you use and how often?

If so, which are the most effective? And why? (consider the benefits already presented)



The Process

Understanding theories of learning - Reading and Reflecting

Issues with this method:

- Not seeing article as a whole
- Research reporting, methods and analysis not seen
- Applying our own biases and emphases



The Process

Understanding theories of learning - Reading and Reflecting

- Annotating the article
- Using short paragraphs in the margins
- Word documents + Review button to add comments (Berliner, 2020)
- Modelling for mentors as more informed research colleagues of the future

See examples of annotated articles

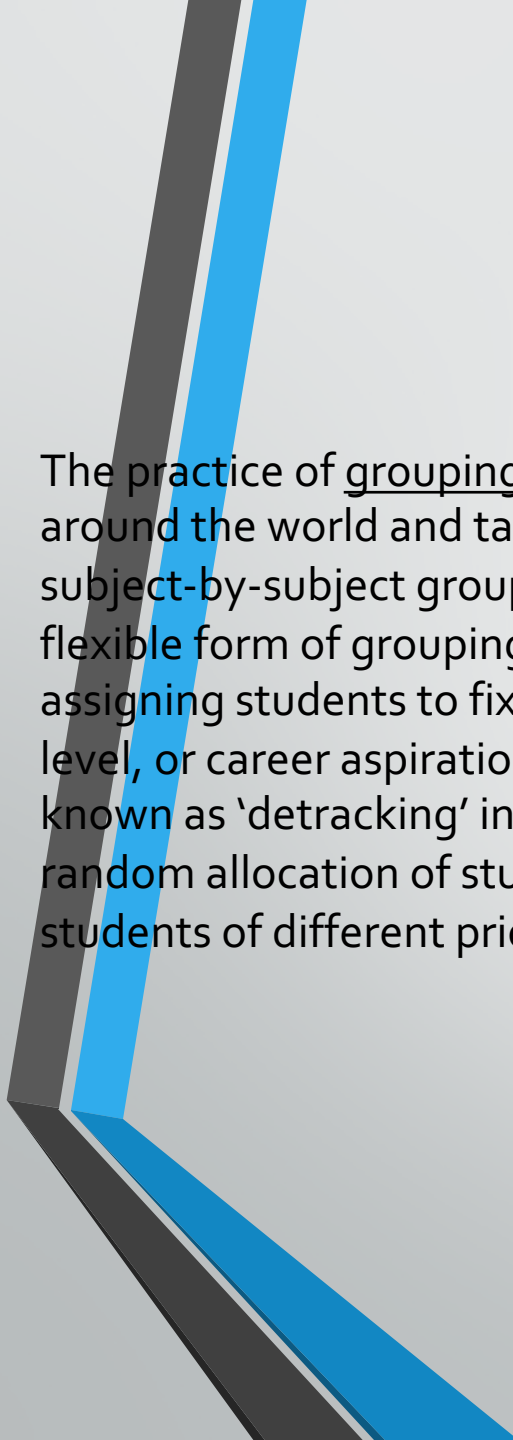
Tereshchenko, A., Francis, B., Archer, L., Hodgen, J., Mazenod, A., Taylor, B., Pepper, D. & Travers, M-C. (2019). Learners' attitudes to mixed-attainment grouping: examining the views of students of high, middle and low attainment, *Research Papers in Education*, 34:4, 425-444

Abstract

There is a substantial international literature around the impact of different types of grouping by attainment on the academic and personal outcomes of students. This literature, however, is sparse in student voices, especially in relation to mixed-attainment practices. Research has indicated that students of different attainment levels might have different experiences and views of grouping structures. This paper represents a significant contribution to this literature. Drawing on the data collected as part of a large study on student grouping and teaching in England, we analyse the attitudes of students of different attainment levels to mixed-attainment practice, focusing on their explanations for their preferences or aversion to mixed-attainment classes. The dataset is drawn from group discussions and individual interviews with 89 students age 11/12 (Year 7) from eight secondary schools practicing mixed-attainment grouping in mathematics and English. Our analysis identifies some broad patterns in student attitudes, including a strong preference for mixed attainment among those at lower prior attainment. The analysis of the explanations students give for their opinions on mixed-attainment practice demonstrates how the learner identities of different groups of students are constituted in various ways by the discourses around 'ability', and constrained by the dominant ideology of 'ability' hierarchy.

Keywords: Ability grouping; mixed ability grouping; attainment; student perceptions.

The abstract gives you an overview of what the paper focuses on and what the authors have found based on their research



The practice of grouping students by 'ability' is commonplace in school systems around the world and takes various forms (Chmielewski [2014](#)). The practice of subject-by-subject grouping, known as 'setting' in the UK, is theoretically a more flexible form of grouping than 'streaming' or 'tracking' systems that involve assigning students to fixed classes based on their presumed ability, achievement level, or career aspirations. Mixed attainment or heterogeneous grouping (also known as 'detracking' in the US and other international contexts) refers either to random allocation of students or a conscious effort to achieve a balance of students of different prior attainment in the class.

This paragraph shows the different ways in which students are grouped by ability (setting, streaming, tracking) as opposed to mixed attainment and explains what these are.

Methodology

The 'Best Practice in Grouping Students' is an ongoing large-scale project. It adopts a randomised control trial (RCT) design to investigate which approach to grouping students in English secondary schools – setting or mixed attainment – is most effective in improving the educational outcomes of students, especially those in low sets and from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Francis et al. [2017](#)). The trial 'Best Practice in Setting' investigates setting in English and/or mathematics across 126 secondary schools located in England. A feasibility study 'Best Practice in Mixed Attainment' investigates mixed-attainment grouping and teaching practices across 13 schools.³ The project also undertakes mixed-method research to explore young people's experiences of different student grouping practices in English and mathematics.

This paper is based on analysis of the qualitative data from the pilot⁴ and main phases of 'Best Practice in Mixed Attainment'. The data-set comprises data from 20 group discussions and nine individual interviews with a total of 89 students aged 11/12 (Year 7) drawn from eight state-funded schools practicing mixed-attainment grouping in core subjects. Three of these schools were part of the pilot phase of the study. The remaining five schools were purposefully sampled from the 13 schools participating in the ongoing trial with the view to representing a variety of pupil demographics (e.g. rural, suburban, and urban; multi-ethnic and predominantly white, deprived and affluent areas, etc.). We also sought to sample schools from both the intervention and control groups⁵ of the trial, as well as some new to mixed-attainment teaching and others with an established practice. Of the schools selected, two were located in the South East, one in the Eastern region, one in Yorkshire, two in the Midlands, two in London (Table 1).

Here the authors describe what they did to inform their research i.e. they focused on Maths and English classes comparing set classes and mixed attainment classes across a large number of schools.

Their data was informed by group discussions and individual interviews with year 7s from 13 schools.

If interested in carrying out your own school based research do read on to find out exactly how they approached this.

Understanding theories of learning - Reading and Reflecting

The benefits

- Additional readings helped mentors to connect practice to theory

'I'm going, 'yes, oh yes, I do that', and didn't realise why I was doing it, maybe! So that's been really enjoyable' (Teacher 2)

- Refreshed existing ideas

'I think I really enjoyed refreshing my understanding and knowledge of learning theory, doing a bit of wider reading. I've enjoyed having you send through the readings, as well as finding my own' (Teacher 3)

- Mentors enjoyed the readings

'it was great to be just served this reading, not too much but just right, ... it was manageable and really interesting' (Teacher 5)



Use of Webinars

- To support the readings and to clarify misunderstandings
- To exemplify theoretical concepts
- To situate the reading in a wider context e.g. use of mixed attainment groupings as a strategy for differentiation

For mixed attainment grouping, student teachers should think about when and how they group pupils (*pairs or larger groupings*) in a lesson or for parts of a lesson.

What is the purpose of this grouping?

Is it temporary or more permanent?

When and why should those groupings change?

Flexibly grouping pupils within a class to provide more tailored support can be effective, but care should be taken to monitor its impact on engagement and motivation, particularly for low attaining pupils.

Practical ideas for grouping students

- Group work:

jigsaws (home and expert) – snowballing – carousel – projects –

fishbowl -

flipped learning



Findings

- Focus group either did not have confidence to propose their own questions based on readings or the time to develop these
- Not all of the focus group engaged with the in-depth theoretical discussions
- A large cohort of 30+ mentors not the same as a focused learning community
- Engagement has been patchy 1/3 of mentors 'attending' training

Recommendations

- Bring together a learning community
- Agree dates and times at start of academic year for sending readings, holding webinars and focus group meetings
- Decide on a target for improvement and innovation that all subscribe to
- Academics to facilitate process and source suitable literature
- Readings to be accessible and purposeful, annotated for ease + questions
- Follow up with webinars, making explicit links between theory and practice
- Hold focus group meetings for follow-up discussions and target setting

Any questions?

