Ability Grouping in the Elementary Classroom and its Effects on Students’ Academic Lives

By: Chris Olenoski
Educational Studies
Prof. Dyrness
Background & Significance

• Scholars’ main arguments about ability grouping.
• Segregates students, puts lower levels at a disadvantage.
• Lower level students put in less effort in school.
• Lower level students don’t receive same education.
Significance

- Another form of school inequality.
- Limits the child’s possible academic success.
- Possible cause for underachievement in schools.
Research Question

- What are teachers’ perceptions of ability grouping and how does ability grouping shape instruction and classroom atmosphere for each group?
Thesis

• Teachers have a positive perception of ability grouping and think it is a good educational tool.

• Disparity in classroom atmosphere and teaching techniques.
Methods

• Interviews with faculty.
• Participant observation in the 6th grade at Hillside Elementary (pseudonym).
• Spent time working with higher and lower leveled groups. Specifically followed one student that was in both.
Findings (Jose)

- Higher level (reading)
- Larger class, well behaved.
- Mutual respect between students and teacher.
- Allowed for learning to be accomplished.

- Lower level (math)
- Small class, poorly behaved.
- Wander the room, talking and shouting out answers.
- Teacher spends too much time disciplining instead of teaching.
Jose conclusion

• Basically went along with the class, was very disciplined and well behaved in reading and the opposite in math.
• The students and class atmosphere in each group have an effect on his behavior and academic success.
Interviews with teachers

• “making the students feel comfortable in the classroom with their peers of the same learning ability is important”
• “it is good for the students and the teacher because we can teach and the students can learn at the same pace”
interviews

• “there is a big difference between the students in each group when it comes to their behavior and effort”
• “When there are distractions I usually just send the student out of the room for a little while”
conclusions

• Teachers believe ability grouping is necessary to benefit both the teacher and the student.

• Observations still conclude that the lower levels are at a disadvantage.