

學生能力分班 捲土重來挨批

Once criticized as racist, student grouping sees spike in schools

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布魯金斯學院 18 日公布研究報告指出，從小學到高中的教師和學校，仍在對學生按能力分組和分班教學，這種措施在過去被批評為種族主義，不利於少數族裔和低收入家庭學生，但過去十年這種措施並未完全消除，甚至有增加。

這個報告審查了各項聯邦教育調查後指出，四年級至八年級學生的能力分組和能力分班大幅增加。全國有色人種促進協會、全國州長協會等都對這種措施加以批評和反對。

能力分組在 1960 和 1970 年代的小學非常普遍，教師可以把同一個班上的學生，按其對課程的理解分成不同的組教學，例如已經學會九九乘法表的學生，可以開始學習更難的課程；能力分班也類似，包括高中生，按其測驗分數分配到不同的班級去上課，例如讓某些十年級的學生去讀榮譽課程班，而其他學生繼續讀基本課程班。

這兩種措施都受到批評，因為它們加強種族和社經地位的差異，美國教師聯盟主席藍迪·韋恩嘉頓說：「能力分組創造了恥辱，恥辱是不好的，當你創立標籤，如這是個學習遲緩者，或這是個學習快手，你就是對兒童創立一個恥辱。」教育家因而都避免這些措施。

領導布魯金斯學院這項研究的該學院資深學者洛夫萊斯說，根據他審查的教育部全國教育進展評估資料，這些措施並未真正被廢除，在 1998 年，只有 28% 的四年級學生，閱讀課被能力分組，到 2009 年，這個比率增加到 71%。數學課被能力分組的學生，從 1996 年的 40%，增加為 2011 年的 61%。

能力分組增加的原因，可能是教師希望在 2002 年「有教無類法」規定的測驗舉行之之前，協助學生趕上閱讀和數學的技巧，在某些地方，學生通過這些測驗也影響教師的考評。

雖然許多對能力分組和分班的研究都顯示，少數族裔和低收入學生受到忽視，但支持能力分組者表示，如果教師受到適當的指示，知道在某些特別的班級如何按兒童的能力，而非外表來分組，能力分組是可以嘉惠所有學生，滿足他們的需要的。

資料來源：(1) 2013 年 3 月 19 日 世界日報 (The World Journal)

(2) 2013 年 3 月 16 日 美聯社 (Associated Press)

Once criticized as racist, student grouping sees spike in schools

Teachers say they are grouping students of similar abilities with each other inside classrooms and schools are clustering pupils with like interests together — a practice once frowned upon — according to a review of federal education surveys.

The Brookings Institution report released Monday shows a dramatic increase in both ability grouping and student tracking among fourth- and eighth-grade students. Those practices were once criticized as racist and faced strong opposition from groups as varied as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to the National Governors Association.

“Despite decades of vehement criticism and mountains of documents urging schools to abandon their use, tracking and ability grouping persist — and for the past decade or so, have thrived,” said Tom Loveless, a senior fellow at the centrist Brookings Institute’s Brown Center on Education Policy, who wrote the report.

Ability grouping was common during the 1960s and ‘70s in elementary school and allowed educators to put their students already in the same classroom into smaller clusters based on their understanding of the lessons. For instance, students who already had mastered their basic multiplication tables could go ahead and start working on more advanced calculations.

Tracking is similar, but happens between academic years and divvies the high school students up into schedules based on their records. An example would be to send some sophomore students into honors courses while others remained in basic courses.

Both faced criticism because they exacerbated racial and socioeconomic differences.

“What happens is ability groupings create stigma and stigma is a bad thing,” American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten said in an interview. “The moment that you create a label that says ‘this is a slow learner’ or ‘this is a fast learner,’ that’s a stigma you’ve created for a kid.”

In response, educators moved away from the practice.

But they didn’t stay away for long — if, in fact, they really ever disappeared in practice.

In 1998, for instance, only 28 percent of fourth graders were put into ability-based reading groups. By 2009, that number rose to 71 percent, according to Education Department data that Loveless reviewed.

“In other words, the odds of a fourth grader being ability grouped in reading were less than 50-50 in 1998, but by 2009 had increased to about 9-to-1,” Loveless wrote.

In math, that number rose from 40 percent of students in ability groups in 1996 to 61 percent in 2011, according to the same surveys.

Loveless reviewed data included in teacher surveys conducted as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a reading and math test known as the nation’s report card. The data is collected every other year.

While the numbers tell an increased reporting of ability grouping and tracking, it’s hard to extrapolate meaning. It’s possible that increased demands on teachers led to more grouping to help students catch up in reading and math skills ahead of tests mandated in the 2002 No Child Left Behind education law. Teachers perhaps identified students on the cusp of passing those tests — which in some places determines teachers’ evaluations — and worked more closely with the pupils they could pull to a passing grade.

Asked why grouping was returning, Weingarten said she had little doubt: “I think the answer is because of this increased fixation on testing and accountability,” she said. “We hear it all the time when you start talking about the bubble, in how they inch kids over the mark of proficiency or not proficiency.”

The report’s numbers themselves do not assign blame or motive.

“They don’t tell us anything about why that’s happening,” said Daria Hall, policy director for the Education Trust, an organization that works on student equity.

But the numbers do offer hints about how students are being taught.

“If you’re a fourth-grade teacher, you’ve probably got kids reading at the kindergarten level and you’ve got kids reading at the eighth- or ninth-grade level. I don’t know how you are supposed to teach a room like that,” said Jane Clarenbach, director of public education at the National Association of Gifted Children. “When you have a kid who is four or five grades ahead, it’s not fair to hold them back. Why would we not do the right thing for the kid who can benefit?”

Plus, she said, students already are clustered whether the schools were reporting it as such.

“We already ability group. You have to be 5 to get in the door for kindergarten,” Clarenbach said.

“We want students to get the most out of their time in the classroom. Don’t we want children to be engaged and not bored?”

Not everyone is convinced that tracking really ever faded.

