



There is no such thing as a test of academic potential: every test is a test of what a person knows at present'
(Gillborn, 2005)

People have come to believe that once 'the test' has been taken, that must show how much 'intelligence' you have not how much 'intelligence' you may be able to gain in the future.

4 Assumptions Made About Grouping Students by 'Ability'

Assumption 1:

Students learn better when they are grouped with others students who are considered to be like them academically, grouped with those who know about the same things, grouped with those who learn at the same rate, or grouped with those who are expected to have similar futures.

Simply not true. Mountains of evidence! This type of grouping doesn't consistently help any group of students to learn better. No group of students has been found to benefit consistently from being in a homogenous group. A few studies show that 'highs' learn more when they are taught in a group of their peers and provided an enriched curriculum. However most do not. Studies show 'High Middle', 'Low Middle' and 'Low' achievers are harmed by their placement in homogenous groups. 'High's' are not held back when they are in mixed classes, the deficiencies of middles and lows are not more easily remediated when they are grouped together.

Assumption 2:

Slower students develop more positive attitudes about themselves and school when they are not placed in groups with others who are far more capable.

Simply not true. Research shows that students placed in average or low groups do not develop positive attitudes about themselves, rather than helping them to feel more comfortable about themselves grouping by 'ability' fosters lowered self-esteem. Often these children participate less in extracurricular activities and have more discipline problems.

Assumption 3:

Placement processes used to separate students into groups both accurately and fairly reflect past achievements and innate abilities.

*Simply not true....there is no test yet devised that measures **potential**. We need to think about whether relative differences are appropriate criteria for separating students for instruction.*

On standardised tests poor and minority students consistently score lower... why, because of language and experience differences, the tests are not 'culture-fair'. The ability to learn is normally distributed among and within social groups. Teacher judgements, are according to research, no more accurate.

Assumption 4:

It is easier for teachers to accommodate individual differences in homogeneous groups or groups are easier to teach and manage.

This is harder to explain as some teachers undoubtedly have experience that tells them this is true however most are unaware of 'other' instructional methods such as Kagan Cooperative Learning which make working with mixed achievement level groups easy. In fact Cooperative Learning is a positive classroom experience for all. Even if grouping by 'ability' were easier it is not worth the educational and social price we pay for it.