**Reflecting on Practice**

The discourse surrounding the term and concept of ‘reflective practice’ has burgeoned over the last few decades throughout various fields of education and professional practice (Loughran, 2000). In some professions it may be a way of thinking about something, whereas for others, it is well-defined and may carry a specific meaning associated with an action (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988). Reflective practice has become a focal aspect in teacher education. According to (Fook & Askeland, 2006) teachers are required to question their practice for their own professional development in order to improve the learner’s performance. Hatton & Smith (1995), suggest that reflective teaching is a complex process which involves more than just thinking about practice and looking back at past events in order to self-improve themselves in isolation. It ideally involves working collaboratively with other professionals in order to gather evidence of one’s own practice and have ongoing re-examinations in the light of that evidence (Reid, 2004).

This paper will critically analyse the principals and practices of reflective practice in an educational setting, in which observations will be carried out to focus on the aspect of ability grouping. It will underpin theories of reflective practice and how they currently inform teaching and learning. It will further discuss how critically reflecting on practice can lead to positive changes for educators as well as learners.

The inquiry of critical reflective practice involves practitioners and educators trying to discover, and research the theories that frame how they work, by questioning their practice (Korthangen & Kessels, 1999). It can be argued that reflecting on practice has become an uncritical orthodoxy, as it can be enacted in many ways and is possibly used by many different professions (Fook et al, 2006). Nevertheless, critical reflection has been predominantly used in the education field by many writers. For example, Brookfield’s (1995) and Mezirow (1991), focused upon the education concept of critical reflection, they underpinned the notion that there are two ways of thinking about being ‘critical’ with ‘reflection’. The first definition involves the process to examine and uncover fundamental assumptions in practice (Mezirow, 1991). Secondly, Brookfield (1995, p.8) emphasises that in order “to make ‘reflection’ critical, it must explicitly unearth the power dynamics that frame our decisions and actions”. Hence, in both senses, it’s about the ability to be transformative and to improve in order to bring fundamental changes in perspectives (Cranton,1996).

The inclusion of elements labelled ‘critical’ and ‘critical reflection’ are often interchangeable has both involve a scrutiny of practice-based assumptions (Fook, 2012a). It’s origins in social work of reflective practice was developed by many philosophers, researchers and social theorists. Reflective practice is a notion which is associated with many outcomes such as critical thinking and undertaking self-assessment in order to improve professional practice (Lewis 2000). In relation to thinking, Dewey (1933) defined reflection as “a judgement adjourned during further enquiry” (Dewey, 1910: 13). He conceptualized reflection has a process of critically analysing and allocating meaning to their practice, in order to accumulate their efficacy (Nieto et al, 2002). According to Jasper & Rolfe (2011), critical reflection is considered important if it leads to changes in practice. Indeed, through constant analysis of their classroom practice, teachers become ‘transformative intellectuals’ which results in improvements of their teaching (Buchroth & Parkin, 2010). However, Dewey’s concept of reflection has been challenged by academic researchers, despite the notion of thinking about action, Dewey did not link it to action taken as the result of reflective thinking (Gore and Zeichner, 1991; Noffke and Brennan, 1988).

Later, drawing upon the implications in Dewey’s (1933) theory of ‘reflective practice’, Donald Schön (1983), believed that ‘reflective practice’ is a process of problem solving. He identified two types of knowledge; ‘reflecting in action’ (at the time of the event) or ‘on action’ (after the event). He believed that practioners need to stand back and identify what the problem is, whilst exploring possibilities and taking actions to see which things work (Mackintosh, 1998). Whilst Schön’s theory seems to differ to the work of Dewey’s, in the sense of considering teachers to implement scientific theory when teaching (Biggs, 2003). Schön’s concept of ‘reflection’ has been criticised for not placing much emphasis on what teachers need to reflect upon (Finlay, 2008). According to Gore and Zeichner (1991), suggests that Schön’s work rejects the importance of ‘technical rationality’ as the means of producing knowledge. Technical rationality holds that practitioners are instrumental problem solvers who select ‘technical means’ that are best suited to the situation they will reflect upon (Kinsella, 20007). However, Schön emphasised that practitioners need to test out and experiment with various methods, in order to deal with situations in practice (Newman, 1999b).

However, Mezirow (1991) stated that, ‘reflection is a way of examining our thoughts and actions of who we are and our identities, whilst implementing strategies and procedures of problem solving’ (p.xvi). While Beauchamp (2006), supported his view, in her theoretical study, she identified various concepts of ‘reflective practice’, at this stage her studies show that ‘reflective practice’ is conceived as a process concerning an object and a view of achieving a particular goal and aim. Hence, in the context of education, ‘critical reflection’ has been perceived to improve professional practice rather than recreating expert knowledge (Barnett, 1994). Although all the literature has different perspectives on their views of reflective teaching, the work of Gilbert (1994.p.512-513), suggests that there are two ways of thinking about education; from one perspective, “it is seen as a servant of economy, where teachers are thought of as ‘technicians’ who already have a set of specifiable skills to improve the learning outcomes in students. Gilbert (1994), referred this has the ‘technicist’ view of education, whilst the second perspective, education is seen as “an agent of social change, where teachers are ‘innovative professionals’ this goes beyond simply having a set of specifiable and technical skills (Gilbert, 1994. P:514). This is seen as ‘liberatory’ view of education, this context is based on the ideas of a Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who considers learners to challenge and change, not merely adapt themselves to it (Killen, 2006).

However, the work of Van Manen (1977), identified three levels of reflection: technical reflection; practical reflection and critical reflection. He proposed that teachers reflect at different levels through engaging in an ongoing spiral, where each element considers the process of change and development (Jay, 2003). Van’s (1977), three cycle model may also be considered as a paralleling development of an individual teacher moving from novice to expert and to master (Larivee, 2008). Nevertheless, Van Manen’s (1977), model incorporates many aspects of Schön’s framework, as they both highlight the need to examine ongoing discussions of evidence both in context in teaching and after the event (Gore,1987). However, there is some confusion of what exactly reflective practice entails for teachers and students (Killeavy & Moloney, 2010). According to Finlay (2008), the effectiveness of the learning or the ‘messiness’ of the class compared to the ‘theoretical’ approaches to reflection. Whilst some may consider it as a way to reflect if the lesson was successful or not, the recognition may demand a more critical approach in order to think of the next steps (Parson & Stephenson, 2005).

Nevertheless, whether teachers reflect on their practice can be determined by two important factors such as the: depth of their reflection and the nature of things they reflect on, varying from technical to ethical issues (Ruch, 2002). In this case, Van (1977), suggested that teacher education programs place more emphasis on the technical aspects of teaching where student teachers are encouraged to question their practice, such as, why does this technique work on this student? They are encouraging students to reflect on the moral, ethical and social aspect of teaching. According to Rolfe (2000), moral approach to reflection brings the political and social context in focus and considers whether teacher training programs contribute to the elimination of inequalities in institutions and the society. Bearing in mind that student teachers come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, may find the process of reflecting on practice difficult (Spalding & Wilson, 2002). For example, students are not fully equipped to critically analyse and make decisions during their teacher training. Therefore, it may just become a tick-box activity which does not result in critical exploration of practice (Loughran, 2002).

A study conducted by Hattie (2003), distinguished the differences between an expert teacher and an experienced teacher, he found that expert teachers possess ample content knowledge and can apply it to other subjects in the curriculum to make learning uniquely in accordance to students needs and abilities. Not only do expert teachers perform better than novices, the difference is that they automatically deal with complex situation with extensive practice (Chase & Simon, 1973). Reflecting on this as a novice practitioner, I believe that critically reflecting alone can be challenging due to having less experience in a classroom environment. According to Auli, et al, (2014), reflection is more effective when it involves working collaboratively with others in order to fully address the questions relating to practice. For example, why it works this way as opposed to how, it’s also about comparing quality of teaching against experience and theoretical knowledge (Hammersley & Orsmond, 2005). Hatton & Smith (1995), suggests that individual reflection is considered to be inefficient has it is influenced by individual biases and does not consider different perspectives. However, it is argued that individuals reflect on themselves including their own assumptions and utilise their knowledge in practice (Heydon and Hibbert, 2010). Mayer (1999), literature on reflection shows that teachers identities develop from their own personal feelings and assumptions and how they see themselves as reflective practitioners. In contrast to this literature, a study conducted by Kuit & Gill (2001), shows that reflecting with other professionals in the field allows for creative thinking skills and the development of teaching strategies in order to cope with the social, cultural and political environment where learning is taking place.

Reflection is understood in context to be learning based on experience, therefore it is important to consider reflective models. Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle provides a framework which enables educators and practitioners to identify an experience to reflect upon. According to Kolb (1984:p 28), “learning is a process where knowledge is originated through the transformation of experience” (Dunlap et al, 2008). The learning cycle involves four stages:

1. Concrete experience- The learner experiments with a concept
2. Reflective observation- The learner reflects on the experience
3. Abstract conceptualization- The learner incorporates a model of what is experienced
4. Active experimentation- The learner applies the model to future experiences.

(Konak et al, 2014)

Kolb (1984), proposed that learning takes place through a four stage process, where concrete stage is the starting point for reflective observation, these observations develop abstract conceptualization to form new theories in order to apply them through active experimentation to form new experiences (Morrow, 2011). Kolb’s reflective cycle has many similarities to other reflective models such as Gibbs (1988), however Kolb (1984), considers experience to be the fundamental foundation for reflecting on practice. Bleakley (1999), argued that Kolb’s conception has positioned reflection within learning, this means educators reflection can be limited to their own personal actions, rather than gaining a more holistic review of reflection on learning and teaching. Whilst Gibbs (1988), reflective cycle which is built upon Kolb’s reflective model, proposed that ‘theory and practice are enriched to each other as a de-briefing sequence’ as a way to facilitate reflection (1988, p.46). Gibbs (1988), model is utilised by many professionals in different fields such as nursing and education with the attention to reflect upon their thoughts and feelings (Finlay, 2008). However, Gibbs (1988) reflective model has failed to address a broader view of critical reflection, therefore many writers have challenged his views on reflective practice. Zeichner and Liston (1996), argue that reflective teachers should move beyond questioning whether their practice is working, they should critically examine how their practice can lead to positive changes.

With regards to this paper, I will critically reflect upon the role of ability grouping in the practice observed. The theoretical models of Schon (1983) and Kolb (1984) will be utilised in this essay, in order to allow critical thinking skills. Kolb’s (1984), reflective model consists of four stages: concrete experience (having an experience); reflective observation (reflecting on the experience); abstract conceptualization (learning from that experience) and active experimentation (incorporating your learning in future practice), this model allows teachers to identify the experience in order to reflect and describe (Buchroth & Parkin, 2010). Schon’s (1983), reflective model consists of two frameworks: Reflection-in-action (reflecting on the moment) and reflection-on-action (reflecting after the event). This model will enable me to identify the issues and multiple factors that have an impact on practice, whilst moving towards experimenting and implementing new concepts in order to see which things work. Despite the limitations of these reflective models, there application is a useful starting point of reflection which are designed to stimulate a deeper level of thinking. They will also allow me to critically examine my observed practice in greater depth, and to question my practice in order to experiment with new ideas and share it with other professionals to gain a wider perspective of the problems observed. According to Moon (2004), the use of reflective models prompts different ways of thinking and questioning personal issues and encourages individuals to apply theoretical knowledge into practice.

The observations were conducted in a primary school. The school had a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above the national average. I chose to conduct my observations in a year five classroom, where the age range of the children are between 9 to 10 years old. Classroom’s are busy environments to carry out observations as there are many different activities going on at the same time (Thomas & Farrell, 2015). According to Cogan (1973:134), classroom observations are defined as “individuals making careful systematic inquiry of events happening in the classroom, either alone or with a colleague. Observations were carried out in two days for a total of eight hours. In order to critically examine the practice, we observed collaboratively in pairs. The purpose was to see things from other perspectives and experiences in practice. According to Loughran (2002), reflecting on practice is best seen as a collaborative activity rather than an individual process, where like-minded colleagues work together to reflect on shifting issues into a pragmatic understanding of pedagogy to facilitate reflection. Avalos (2010), concludes that not only collaboration improves teacher’s knowledge and professional learning, but significantly improves the outcomes of student’s performance and achievements. Studies in collaborative learning show that in schools where teachers collaborate on issues have resulted in an improvement in student’s performance and achievement levels (Goddard & Goddard, 2007 and Snow, 2005).

The first stage of Kolb’s (1984) reflective learning cycle is ‘concrete experience’. According to Beard & Wilson (2006), concrete experience is defined as a step-by-step instruction to demonstrate a new concept. Prior, to Schon’s (1983) framework, I will critically reflect in action, where I will identify the problem experienced in practice. Kolb’s (1984) reflective theory, suggests that, practitioners need to step back from the situation and critically examine the evidence, in order to see where the students are working at and how reflecting on practice through evidence can improve and facilitate their learning. Indeed, according to Ball (2013), practioners seek to identify problems which may not be visible to others as problems as this will allow them to employ different strategies to reform their practice. In a contrasting view, Lougran (2002), states that stepping away from the situation, practitioners will less likely remember the events which had taken place. Therefore, as a reflective practioner, the observations were recorded in a reflective journal, as this helped me to identify what the problem is. This favoured method is used widely in varying fields, from health to education professions. Although, Burrows (1995) and Burnard (1995), argued that the use of reflective journals/diaries as evidence of practice are considered to be time-consuming and can lead to issues of confidentiality. According to Timperley and Par (2009), evidence from students can be used in meaningful ways, which allows practitioners to see where students are in their learning and to identify any gaps, in order to see what they know and what they need to know in accordance to the curriculum.

As a participant observer, I had the opportunity to observe the children in their natural classroom environment and to see them interact with each other. The classroom had a total of 28 students where there were 15 girls and 13 boys. The teacher organised the classroom in five different ability groups based on their academic and achievement levels of the core subjects in literacy and numeracy. In England, grouping students by ability has been a common practice since decades (Boaler et al, 2000). In the 1950s, students were ‘streamed’ as a process of being segregated into different ability groups in different subjects (Jackson, 1964). The term ‘streaming’ describes the process of allocating homogeneous groups into different sets based on the measures of students’ performance (Macqueen, 2011). This practice is still widespread in the UK today, where children are taught in mixed ability groups for different subjects with different teachers (Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008). The Education Reform Act (ERA) (1988), required settings to adopt the national curriculum and the national assessment, which was differentiated and structured. However, it has been argued that this framework has created an educational ‘marketplace’ based on the performance on standardised tests (Hallam and Ireson 2007). In other words, middle-class parents get attracted to the schools who do well in their league tables.

The dominant discourse of segregating students by ability is amongst several competing purposes in education (Gamson, 2019). According to Hanson (1993), educators who encourage sorting students in mixed ability groups from high, average to low often justify those practices based on the ‘bell curve’. The ‘bell-curve’ is identified has a model of distribution which determines the success and failure rates of students in society (Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008). Back in the nineteenth century, educators identified many challenges faced by students who were falling behind due to monotonous routines and the age grading systems (Gamoran & Berends, 1987). A study conducted by Hall (1883), was one of the most important studies in developing intelligence tests that promoted education experts to create a more systematic approach to sort students in mixed ability groups with accordance to their academic levels. Reflecting on practice, each ability groups were labelled with a specific colour to distinguish themselves from one another. The table colours were purple, orange, yellow, turquoise and blue. Students with the similar academic levels sat on the same table. The grouping was in accordance to the New refined National Curriculum Published in September 2013, replaced the ‘levels’ with ‘attainment targets’, in order to give schools and teachers more freedom to plan activities for the distinctive needs of the students (Department for Education, 2013). Nevertheless, it is also seen as an advantage for teachers to teach students of similar abilities (Muijs & Dunne, 2010).

The main benefit for mixed ability grouping is that teachers find their job easier as it allows them to tailor their pace and content of instructions much better to students’ academic levels (Kutnick et al. 2005). Reflecting on practice, during numeracy hour, the teacher introduced a new topic on fractions and decimals, she then assigned work according to the different abilities and gave each table specific activities to complete. However, through Schon’s (1983) reflecting-in-action, I noticed that the special education needs students and students with English as an additional language were all sat on one table to work out the mathematical problems. The students from the lower ability tables were guided by the teaching assistant, whilst students who are working above average were involved in independent work. According to Ansalone and Biafora (2004), stated that in set classes the lower ability students will not be left behind, whilst the higher ability students are less likely to become bored as the lessons are more likely to be challenging in accordance to their needs. Gamoran (2002), asserts that placing students into homogenous groups can increase academic levels, particularly students who are in the higher ability sets. He further stated that it allows them to uncover new dimensions of knowledge by practicing challenged learning activities. However, reflecting on Kolb’s (1984), second stage of the cycle ‘reflective observation’ the problem identified was that students did not have the opportunity to mix with other different attainment groups. The evident from observations showed that students from the higher ability group felt pressurised to complete all the tasks, whilst the lower ability group finished off their tasks early with the support of the teaching assistant and spent the rest of their lesson time talking amongst each other.

Many researchers (Boaler et al (2000); William and Bartholomew (2004) & Marks, (2013) have all argued the effects of ability grouping on academic attainment is limited. Experimental studies were carried out by Boaler et al, (2000), where students reading and mathematics lessons were observed in 15 schools of streaming and mixed ability grouping, their study indicated little evidence in performance on standardised tests. Babad’s (1993), literature stated that, students from the low ability groups are more likely to be taught an ‘impoverished’ curriculum that does not engage them to think critically and is limited to simple drill and practice exercises. Indeed, according to William and Bartholomew (2004), settings have failed to provide low ability students the access to have a rich and full curriculum in order to widen the gap between ability grouping. Research has shown that lower ability groups have a dis-proportionate number of pupils from lower socio-economic groups, ethnic minorities and those who are born in summer (Kutnick et al., 2006). Others have argued that students tend to be labelled and stereotyped which can have a negative effect on their self-esteem, self-concept and their attitudes towards schooling, in particularly the lower ability groups (Lacey, 1974 and Oakes, 1985). Reflecting on the evidence, most of the students in the lower-ability groups were special education needs and had English as an additional language.

However, even though ability grouping has had negative impacts on students. Recent studies conducted by Higgins et al, (2015), revealed that many schools have now adopted mixed systems where students are regrouped in mixed attainment groups in core subjects, the study found that mixed attainment grouping had a positive effect on the achievement of lower attaining students. Furthermore, mixed attainment groups were found to encourage greater self-esteem levels and positive attitudes towards school. Kolb’s (1984), abstract conceptualization stage, allows practitioners to generate ideas and to put what has been worked in practice. As a reflective practitioner, I did not notice this in my observations, but during my time as a teaching assistant, children were sat in mixed attainment groups for core subjects in numeracy and literacy. I found that their social levels increased as they appeared happier in their groups. According to Hallam and Ireson (2007), their survey found that students expressed preferences in mixed-attainment groups as they had equality learning opportunities to social mix in groups. Nevertheless, some students of different attainment levels disliked the competitive and stressful environment of working alongside higher ability groups (Walls, 2009). This is a challenge for teachers, as they may face difficulty teaching challenging materials in a mixed attainment classroom, with limited time to scaffold in order to help struggling learners (Lazarowitz, 2008).

Considering, Akabari (2007) findings concluded, being in mixed attainment groups shapes students support in the education system as it allows the different ability students to help one another. He further stated that, this support is also beneficial to their own learning as they work collaboratively with each other. Reflecting on the evidence, children were working in groups during literacy time, where they had to act out a poem with actions. I felt that students were truly engaged by sharing each other’s ideas and working on to improve their performance. According to Tereshchenko (2019), mixed-attainment practices facilities learning opportunities for students to get help from their peers. Indeed, Hallam & Ireson (2007), studies found that, in core subject classes where students worked in homogeneous groups, found that students accomplished very little without the input of their competent peers or teachers. On the other hand, collaborative work in mixed attainment groups allowed pupils who were regarded as weak in their learning, to outshine in areas. According to Kolb’s (1984:p20) reflective cycle learners engage in the abstract conceptualisation as a ‘result of past experiences this enables the transformation and development in practice’.

Applying Schon’s (1983) reflection-on action, this essay highlighted the main problem of ability grouping and how it limits and hinders students learning, all schools are required to plan an inclusive curriculum, learning activities, teaching resources and assessments in a way that caters for the needs of all students learning styles. However, this can become a problem when teachers show uncertainty and ambiguity about what and how to assess students’ capabilities (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2011). According to Gillies & Boyle (2010), teachers face many challenges organising group work, such as finding it difficult to assess student’s performance and achievement levels during collaborative working. For example, a study conducted by Ruys et al, (2012), analysed collaborative activities planned by teachers, they found that insufficient attention was given in order to determine group norms and facilitate critical learning. Furthermore, the problems teachers encounter can have a detrimental effect on the quality of students collaborative learning (Strom & Strom, 2011).

In order to address these problems, studies were conducted in schools, the interviews from the teachers found that “It’s straightforward to measure the students learning outcomes through individual tests, however it is difficult to see how they improve during collaborative learning” (Janssen & Wubbels, 2018: p.108). This shows that how teachers have limited knowledge on collaborative work, there are many factors that contribute to this such as: lack of pedagogical knowledge, lack of training and experience during their teacher training programme (Storm & Storm, 2011). It has also been argued that teachers pay more attention to rating individual learning assessments, rather than collaborative performance. According to Frykedal & Chiriac, (2011), these types of assessments do not encourage students learning rather hinders them. This focus on standards sometimes leads school teachers to think of their practice as a ‘black box’, this is due to the external forces from management and standards and tests, that teachers are most likely to overlook the importance of what is inside the box (William & Black, 2010). With the external pressures, teachers may not have the time or knowledge to bring in innovation to their teaching and pedagogies to accelerate students learning.

Therefore, it’s important to bring out this change that teachers need to be given the opportunities to critically reflect on their practice and have the space to identify the problems in order to act (Marks, 2013). By doing this, they need to work collaboratively with other professionals in a team. The Standards for Teachers professional Development emphasises the importance for teachers to work with and from each other (Dfe, 2016). However, in order to make the judgemental decisions, practitioners may need guidance from an experienced mentor or coach. According Gajda & Koliba (2008), collaborative working allows for joint lesson planning, reviewing and interpreting students work together in order to implement effective pedagogical strategies. Additionally, teachers should engage into deeper levels of reflection and to consider alternative perspectives beyond their own experiences and external guidelines (Murray, 2015). For example, the evident from observations showed that how higher ability pupils felt pressurised in completing the activities and the middle and lower abilities completed their tasks quickly. In accordance to this, teachers need to reflect on the evidence and identify ways to implement strategies to encourage higher-order thinking skills. However, this raises a question: Do teachers find the time and space to engage on reflective practice? (Larrivee, 2008). According to Hattie (2009), educators often focus on the burdensome of the job, where they tend to adopt certain teaching strategies in order impress the performance management and Ofsted inspections. Rather than critically reflect on the intellectual and practical details of practice. Therefore, Hattie (2009) suggests, this is when mentoring and coaching becomes an inherently reflective process.

Mentoring is defined as a ‘intense relationship between an inexperienced teacher (mentee) and an experienced teacher (mentor) (Douglas, 1997). Mentors aim to support the mentees learning and development as a teacher, in accordance to the norms and values of the organisation (Craig, 1996). On the other hand, coaching focusses more on performance and skills enhancement (Joyce and Showers, 1983). Furthermore, Joyce & Showers (1983) stated that coaching is used as a method to improve teaching strategies, problem-solving and to experiment with new ideas and techniques. in order to bring about change that involves improving professional practice, teachers need the opportunity to engage with relevant theories and have the time to implement them in their teaching context (Ghayle & Gyale, 1998). According to Murray (2015), this transformational change can only be facilitated through coaching and mentoring relationships between practitioners and experienced colleagues. As a reflective practitioner, it was evident that mixed attainment groups enhanced students’ interactions as they were working collaboratively with other students in groups. I believe that re-grouping students in mixed attainment groups can allow them to flourish and learn beyond their expected learning levels as a result of working and interacting with their competent peers.

In conclusion, this essay critically examined the principles and practices of reflective practice. It critically analysed the historical models of reflection and how they have cultivated to support professionals in education and other disciplines. Each reflective model has identified that critically reflecting on practice or prior experience can improve the outcomes on teacher’s performance and their professional development as well as students learning and achievements. Utilising Schon’s (1983) and Kolb’s (1984) reflective models as enabled me to critically reflect on a higher-level of thinking about the practice observed. These models further allowed me to reflect upon my thoughts and feelings and structure them in this essay. As a result, they provided me with opportunities to search relevant theories that underpin the complexities observed in practice.

This essay further critically analysed the aspects of ability groupings in todays society and how they foster, as well as hinder students learning abilities. In accordance to research, mixed ability grouping in core subjects limited the students learning potentials in order to succeed, as evident in observations. However, the latest system on re-grouping students allowed them to facilitate in their learning. As evident in observations, students who were put in mixed-attainment groups showed an increase difference in their learning as well as their social skills.

Nevertheless, there were implications whether the teachers were experienced accordingly to plan appropriate lessons that catered for all students in the class. As evident in literature, some novice teachers had limited experience and training to support mixed-attainment groups. However, research stated that in order to improve the learning outcomes of students and their own professional development, teachers need to consider collaborating with a coach or mentor. Research evidence has shown that effective collaboratively working can allow educators to listen to other perspectives and implement changes in their plans, in accordance to relevant theories and experience to improve their professional practice.

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