

<p align="center">“Preventing School Underachievement Through Ability Grouping Practices In Schools: Perspectives From Programme Local Coordinators, Teachers And Social Workers”</p>	<p align="center">ECER 2018</p> <p align="center">Inclusion and Exclusion, Resources for Educational Research?</p> <p align="center">4 – 7 September 2018</p>
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This paper is part of a research project founded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, “EDUPLACES - Educating places: practices, voices and pathways of inclusive education”, focused on socio-educational inclusion practices. The project research questions are: which processes and factors, subjects, action rationales and (institutional, local, community) partnerships contribute to building local inclusive education practices, in the views of actors involved? which (social, institutional, biographical) processes and factors stop the negative spiral of school underachievement, school dropout and ESL and favour the youngsters’ remobilization to learn and build successful academic pathways?

The research design consists of a multiple-case study of eleven observation units in four Portuguese countries, in the context of two national Programs targeted to overcome school underachievement and ESL and promote social inclusion. Based on a triangulation of sources and a set of criteria derived from literature review, a portfolio of eleven inclusive socio-educational practices was characterized.

Analysis of the practices allowed a typology of inclusive practices: Ability Grouping; Study Support; Mediation and Pedagogical Differentiation. This presentation is centred in the ability grouping.

There are many different definitions, nuances and empirical approaches of ability grouping (Loveless, 2013). Ability grouping, or homogeneous grouping, is defined as the separation of same-grade school children into groups or classes based on school aptitude. This separation may occur in all subjects or only in particular subjects (e.g.

reading and mathematics) and grouping may occur based on test scores or school records of grades (Kulik, 1992).

In the 1970s and 1980s, a barrage of studies criticized ability grouping, stressing issues like its impact on self-esteem, effectiveness of instruction and equity among minority groups (Braddock & Slavin, 1992). In the last years, we witness a resurgence of ability grouping and the term “differential instruction” is been used to define grouping students by prior achievement or skills level (Loveless, 2013). However, despite the extensive research on this topic, it’s hard to find clear cut conclusions about the advantages and disadvantages of ability grouping. As pointed out by Ireson & Hallam (1999:343), “Those favouring structured grouping tend to stress its effectiveness in terms of pupil achievement, whereas those against stress the inequity of the system and its social consequences.” In addition, the evidence suggests that “different grouping programs produce different effects” (Kulick, 1992:ix) and that “There appear to be complex interactions between grouping, teaching methods, teacher attitudes, the pacing of lessons and the ethos of the school” (Ireson & Hallam, 1999:343).

The two ability grouping practices under study may have different results in the studied groups that should be read carefully, either from the effectiveness in achieving the intended result, or in particular in the equality of opportunities to knowledge access.