Flexible Grouping

Teachers can assign students to learning groups based on same or mixed level ability with explicit learning goals. Once groups have been established, teachers monitor peer interactions and provide positive, corrective feedback to support productive learning. Using small learning groups to accommodate learning differences, teachers promote in-depth student interactions, teach students to work collaboratively, and keep students engaged.

**FLEXIBLE GROUPING:** accommodate diverse levels of readiness

**What is It?** Flexible grouping addresses the overuse of whole group instruction and the disengagement of students who needed the most help in a diverse classroom setting. Flexible grouping is not static; instead, for example, members of a reading group change frequently. Some examples of flexible grouping are:

- **Grouping without tracking** where the teacher offers varying levels of support.
- **Jigsawing** where students receive differentiated instruction within a text.
- **Connected Literature Circles** where teachers select different whole texts for different sets of students based on group matched reading level.
- **Focused Workshops** where lessons are taught to the whole class to guide students as they work independently.
- **Formative Assessment** followed by homogenous/heterogeneous grouping of students based on level of mastery.
- **Random Assignments** for students based on role assignments or color coding cards.

**TEACHING IN ACTION** Flexible groups must be created within a highly structured classroom environment. Teachers must monitor student progress, group performance, provide positive and constructive feedback as well as hold students accountable to increase their student agency.
LEADERSHIP IN ACTION  Leaders model when they work with teachers to establish appropriate data driven instructional decisions, create dynamic assessments, and create an evidence-based school environment. Leaders help to develop a system of routines to support differentiation.

See the videos of successful uses of flexible grouping in Reading Comprehension, Differentiated Instruction, Reading Strategies Grades K - 1, Reading Strategies Grades 2 - 6, Reading Strategies High School and videos on applications of flexible grouping.

How effective is it?  Research shows students who were instructed in schools that incorporated flexible grouping improved their reading skills whereas schools not incorporating this strategy did not show the same improvement. Small homogenous skill-based groups are a critical in the tiered reading intervention model.

- The average effect size of interventions that influence student achievement is .40.
- Student’s cooperative learning can be structured into competitive (students working against each other to achieve a goal) or individualist (students working independently to achieve a goal) arrangements. Flexible groups that incorporate an individualist style have a 0.59 rate of success whereas groups that incorporate a competitive format have a success rate of 0.54.
- In some cases, cooperative learning which is a type of flexible grouping method, has a higher success in reading (e.g., reading, d = 0.44 vs. math, d = 0.01), and the success rate increases with age (e.g., elementary, d = 0.28, vs. middle school, d = 0.33, vs. high school, d = 0.43)
- An effect size close to “1” signals greater effect on student learning.

WHAT TEACHERS ARE TEACHING AND STUDENTS ARE LEARNING

Groups can change frequently to meet the different needs of the student. This requires organization, monitoring and data driven decisions. To ensure students show mastery of the content, teachers should provide high quality instruction that is evidence-based and highly responsive to students’ complex and varied needs.

Sources