

What is flexible grouping?

Flexible grouping is a term that covers a range of grouping students for delivering instruction, such as whole class, small group, and partner.

- Instruction is provided in flexible groupings to maximize student performance. Whole-group instruction or heterogeneous grouping may be used when the objectives are appropriate for the range of learners in the classroom. Homogeneous grouping may be used to customize specific instruction for assessed student needs.
- Group size and composition are adjusted to accommodate and reflect student progress and instructional objectives (flexible and dynamic grouping).
- Tutoring (peer or adult or both) is used judiciously to supplement (not supplant) explicit teacher-delivered instruction. It aligns with classroom objectives and instruction.
- Cross-class or cross-grade grouping is used when appropriate to maximize opportunities to tailor instruction to students' performance levels. Such grouping is appropriate when it facilitates teaching students within a similar age span and achievement range. As a general rule, differences should be within one year in kindergarten through grade three, two years in grades four through eight, and three years in grades nine through twelve.
- Centers and independent activities are used judiciously and are aligned with instructional goals and objectives focused on achieving grade-level standards.

Using common sense when grouping is important, as research shows that what students are taught has a far greater effect on their achievement than how they are grouped (Mosteller, Light, & Sachs, 1996). The first focus of educators should always be on the quality of instruction; grouping is a secondary concern. Grouping is an instructional strategy that should be used flexibly to ensure that all students achieve the standards. Instructional objectives should always be based on the standards and should dictate grouping strategies.

In *Flexible Grouping* (2000), Catherine Valentino states that teachers who use flexible grouping strategies often employ several organizational patterns for instruction. Students are grouped and regrouped according to specific goals, activities, and individual needs. When making grouping decisions, the dynamics and advantages inherent in each type of group must be considered. Both teacher-led and student-led groups can contribute to learning.

What to consider when differentiating instruction

How and when to group students is a strategy employed to differentiate instruction after reviewing relevant student evaluation information and considering learner profiles. To promote maximum learning, the teacher should ensure that assessment is frequent, that high-quality instruction is always provided, and that the students are frequently moved into appropriate instructional groups according to their needs.

In order to differentiate instruction, teachers can group students who do not understand a concept or skill and find time to reteach the concept or skill in a different way, providing additional practice. At the same time, those students might be participating with a more heterogeneous mix of students in other classroom activities. In another setting, teachers may learn that a number of students in a grade who have mastered the standards for that grade, and are ready to go on to the standards for the next grade, benefit by being grouped together for as long as the grouping meets their needs and to provide the needed accelerated instruction.

Resources

1. Differentiation Through Flexible Grouping: Successfully Reaching All Readers

<http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/literacy/flexibleGrouping.pdf>

2. Flexible Grouping

<http://www.eduplace.com/science/profdev/articles/valentino.html>

3. Developing a Flexible Grouping Lesson Plan

<http://www.learner.org/workshops/readingk2/session6/piip2.html>

Source: User Group IDOE - Indiana Literacy Liaisons...Read On, Indiana!_