

You CAN Make Flexible Grouping Work!

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Cluster Grouping

- The practice of placing high achieving, high ability, or gifted students in a regular classroom with other students and a teacher who has received training or has a desire to differentiate curriculum and instruction for those target students.
 - (Gentry, 1999)

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Cluster Grouping

- 3-10 gifted students are placed in classrooms with students of other achievement levels.
- Curriculum is differentiated.
- Teacher of gifted students is trained to work with gifted students.

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Joplin Plan

- Preassessment based on specific skill or content knowledge
- Flexible, temporary
- After preassessment, students move to another teacher for instruction
 - Reading
 - Math
- Curriculum is differentiated
- Teachers are trained to teach to students' levels

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Joplin Plan: Concerns

- Scheduling
- Class time lost to movement
- Stigma if cross-grade grouping

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The Goals and Purposes for Flexible Small Groups (FSG)

- Promote independent learning and self-discipline
- Foster intrinsic motivation
- Address time management and cooperative skills
- Improve attitudes towards learning
- Permit curriculum differentiation

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Flexible Small Groups: A Definition

- Group membership varies
 - By prior knowledge, interests, preferences
- Group longevity varies
- Group varies by purpose
 - Instruction, learning activities, topic, resources, product development
- Group varies by size
 - 2-10 students

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A Rationale for Flexible Small Groups

- More attentive to individual needs than permanent small groups
- More responsive to individual differences than whole group work
- Less damaging to self-esteem than full-time ability grouping
- Based on social learning theory
- More effective than random cooperative learning groups
- Provides for scaffolding
- Addresses students' Zone of Proximal Development

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Designing Small Group Activities

- Goal (instruction, learning, or product development)
- Directions
- Resources
- Rules-/Requirement
- Timeline or Sequence
- Activities
- Evidence
- Reaction

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Locating FSG Options, Resources, and Activities

- Teachers' guides
- Enrichment materials for children
- Magazines and newspapers
- Software
- Activity books
- ERIC and the web

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Selecting FSG Activities: The Acid Test

- Are they related to our learning goals?
- Do they lend themselves to a small group activity?
- Do they offer differentiation opportunities?
- Are they motivating and appealing?
- Can they be completed in an appropriate timeframe?
- Will they be too disruptive?
- Can the work be documented and analyzed?

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Scheduling Time for FSGs

- Whole class practice sessions
- Special time of the week
- During differentiation time
- Coupled with anchoring and centering activities
- During dual coverage opportunities
- During volunteer time

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Preparing Students for FSGs

- Clear and consistent management procedures
- Class meetings and overviews of various FSG activities
- Gradual introduction (mix of new and old activities)
- Dry-runs (role-playing, problem solving, feedback)
- September orientation sessions

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Monitoring Students

- Roving
- Signs
- Silent signals
- Progress charts
- Helpmates
- Contracts
- Checklists
- Products
- Reflective logs

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Monitoring Student Activities

- Contracts or progress charts
- Self-correcting activities
- Reflective logs
- Sharing time

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Rules, Expectations, and Consequences

- Noise levels
- On-task behavior and accountability
- Movement (how to)
- Sharing (how to)
- Help and cooperating with others
- Consequences

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Management Strategies

- Start small
- Design a schedule
- Plan and get feedback
- Check and recheck for quality assurance
- Rearrange the room
- Design monitoring devices
- Provide students with an orientation
- Start with product groups
- Gather evidence

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Anchor Activities

- Portfolio management
- Journal writing
- Routine rehearsal tasks
- Centers or stations
- Silent reading
- Manipulatives

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Scheduling and Rotations

Three Group Paradigm

- ✓ Instruction (A, B, C, Free)
- ✓ Learning Activities (Open, A, B, C)
- ✓ Centers (C, Open, A, B)
- ✓ Anchoring Activities (B, C, Open, A)

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Difficulties with Flexible Small Groups

- Teachers' efficacy levels
- Planning, support, and technical assistance
- Scheduling and rotations
- Room arrangements
- Resources
- Student behavior
- Monitoring student learning

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Planning for the Future

- Subject area decisions
- Teaming, volunteers, and support
- Resource acquisition
- Scheduling planning time
- Implementation
- Collection and sharing of evidence
- Monitoring results

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Things Take Time: Start Small



- **One unit in one content area**
- **One lesson in one unit**
- **One student in one lesson in one unit**

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