

Grouping: Debunking the Myths



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Presentation Topics

- I. What are some of the myths surrounding the grouping issue?**
- II. What are best practices related to grouping formats used in classrooms?**
- III. What management strategies can teachers use to support these practices?**



Myths

- **MYTH 1:** Grouping strategies are, for the most part; pretty similar. (T/F)
- **MYTH 2:** The more students work in small groups, the less time students have with the teacher and this practice translates into lower levels of learning and achievement. (T/F)
- **MYTH 3:** When students work in small groups, the self-esteem of some students is affected negatively. (T/F)
- **MYTH 4:** When above-grade level students teach other students, they REALLY master the material. (T/F)
- **MYTH 5:** Grouping is not as necessary at the secondary level because leveled classes are available. (T/F)
- **MYTH 6:** The use of proactively designed, flexible small groups is relatively commonplace in classrooms. (T/F)

Myth 1: Comparing Small Group Options

Cooperative Groups	Ability Groups	Flexible, Small Groups
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-

Cooperative Groups	Ability Groups	Flexible, Small Groups (FSGs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Varied roles - Heterogeneous ability - Interactive - Similar tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tend to be fixed - Based on prior achievement - Homogeneous by achievement - Can effect a student's expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible membership - Based on a variety of factors - Student-led - Promote ownership, leadership - Understanding enhances self-esteem

FSGs: A Definition

Within class groupings in which membership varies according to:

- Purpose (e.g., learning goals, topics, learning activities, resources, product preferences)
- Group longevity
- Group size (2-10)



Myth 2: Grouping May Be Associated With Diminished Student Learning

“Both cooperation in problem solving and argumentation among students in an intellectual community enhance cognitive development.”



National Research Council. (2002). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press

Myth 3: Self-Esteem

“The talented students who are in [grouped programs] almost always gain academically and do not become smug or self-satisfied....If anything, they may become slightly more modest about their abilities....This study provided little support for the common belief that grouping programs have negative effects on slower learners. On the contrary, flexible, homogenous groups often helped to improve the self esteem of slower learners.”



Kulik, J. A. (1992). *An analysis of the research on ability grouping: Historical and contemporary perspectives*. Storrs, CT: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

Purposeful, Flexible Grouping: What We've Learned



- ✓ **More attention to individual differences**
- ✓ **More responsive to individual differences than whole group work**
- ✓ **Less damaging to self-esteem than ability grouping all by itself**
- ✓ **More effective than random cooperative grouping**
- ✓ **Based on social learning theory**
- ✓ **Provides for scaffolding**
- ✓ **Address students' varying zones of proximal development**

What Else We've Learned...

- **FSGs can enhance achievement**
- **FSGs can honor student differences**
- **FSGs permit curriculum differentiation**
- **FSGs foster self-regulatory behaviors**



THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

- ✓CONTENT
- ✓INTRODUCTION
- ✓INITIAL INSTRUCTION
- ✓PREASSESSMENT
- ✓DIAGNOSIS

What are the **CRITICAL DIFFERENCES** in my students?

How can I **MODIFY** one or more of the 10 curriculum components to address difference?

CONTENT

ASSMNTS

GRPG

INTRO

TCHG

LRNG

PROD

RES

EXT.

TIME

CHOICE

ALTERNATIVES

Adjusting the Breadth

TIERING

Adjusting the Depth

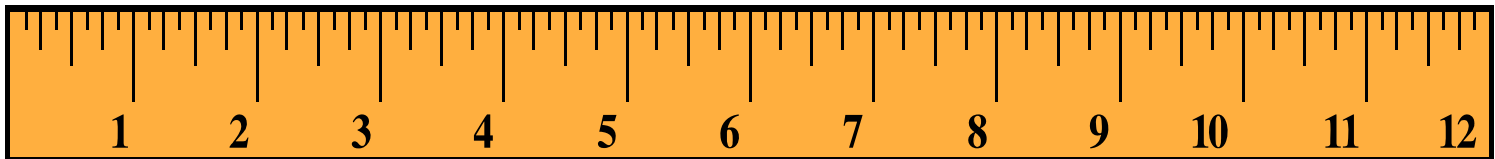
MANAGEMENT OF FLEXIBLE, SMALL GROUPS

POST ASSESSMENT

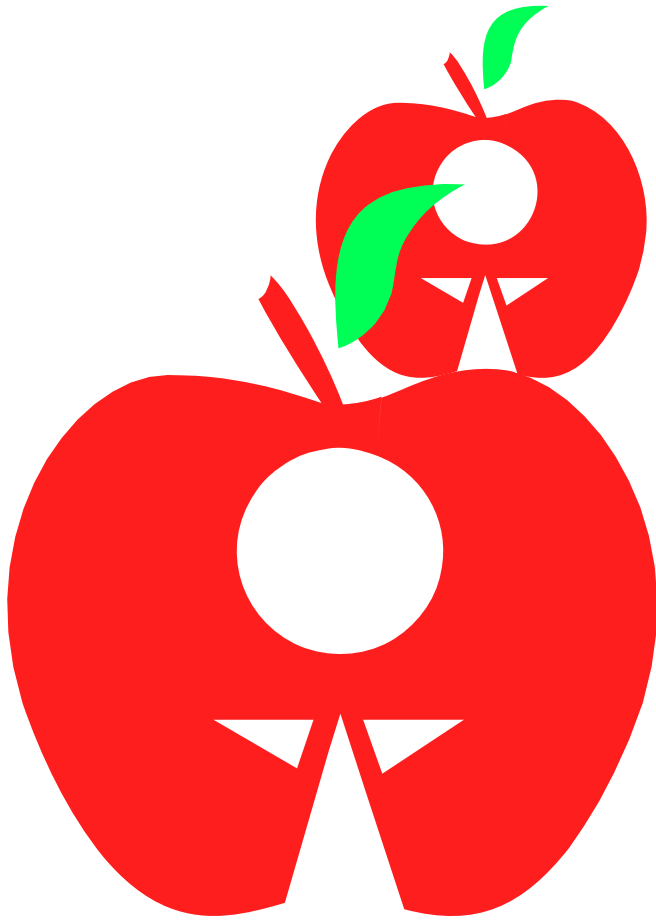
MEASURE THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENTIATION

The Performance Standard: Does It Measure Up?

- ✓ **Does it align with local, state and national standards?**
- ✓ **Is it developmentally appropriate?**
- ✓ **Is it representative of the discipline?**
- ✓ **Is it attainable?**



Uncovering Powerful Differences: Diagnostic Tools



- K-N-W charts
- Journals
- Parent Letters
- Products
- Performances
- Conferences/Interviews
- Concept Maps

Critical Student Differences We Can Attend

ACADEMIC

- Prior knowledge
- Reading level
- Core content
- Concepts/skills

SOC/EMOT

- Interests
- Learning styles
- Motivation
- Self-efficacy

COGNITIVE

- Developmental readiness
- Schemas
- Working memory
- Thinking skills
- Learning rate

Management Is Key...

Organizing the Classroom

Scheduling Time for FSGs

Role of the Teacher

Considering Resources

Giving Directions

**Developing Anchor
Activities**

**Monitoring Student
Progress**



Organizing the Classroom



- **Areas for small group work**
- **Small group instructional areas**
- **Places for student-to-student interaction**
- **Meeting places for the entire class**
- **Balance between quiet and not-so-quiet areas**
- **Signs and labels**
- **Materials/supplies/equipment organized for students' use**
- **Places to display student work**
- **Maintenance and clean-up system**
- **Traffic flow**
- **Outside areas, such as hallways???**



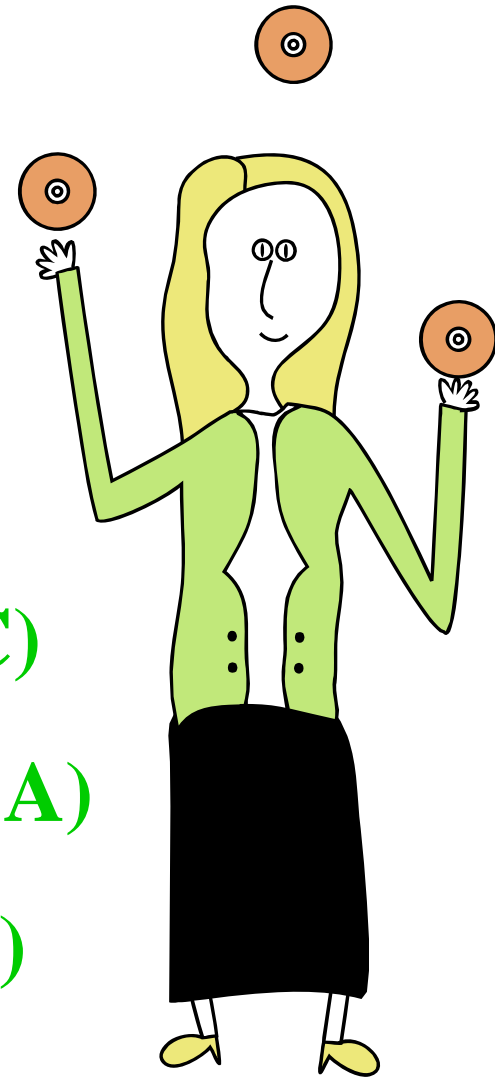
Scheduling Time for FSGs

- **Whole class practice sessions**
- **Special time of the week**
- **Coupled with anchoring and optional activities**
- **During volunteer time**
- **In one subject area**



Role of the Teacher: The Three Group Paradigm

1. Teaching Group (A, B, C, Open)
2. Learning Activities (Open, A, B, C)
3. Anchoring Activities (B, C, Open, A)
4. Optional Activities (C, Open, A, B)



Identifying and Locating Resources

■ HUMAN

- ◆ Other teachers
- ◆ Students
- ◆ Community members
- ◆ Experts
- ◆ University personnel

■ NON-HUMAN

- ◆ Newspapers
- ◆ Primary source documents
- ◆ Realia/Artifacts
- ◆ Maps
- ◆ Next grade-level text
- ◆ Software
- ◆ Video/Audio tapes
- ◆ Internet
- ◆ United Video
<http://www.unitedstreaming.com/>

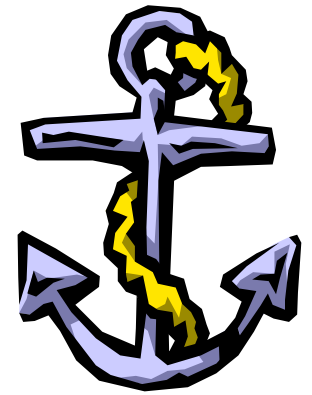


Giving Directions to FSG



- **Whole group directions by the teacher**
- **Whole group directions followed by small group directions by the teacher**
- **Small group directions by selected students**
- **Small group instructions by aid, tutor, or parent**
- **Written directions, task cards**
- **Audio-taped directions**
- **Picture directions**

Anchor Activities



- **Listening center**
- **Writing center**
- **Reading center**
- **Computer center**
- **Art projects**
- **Math facts**
- **Journal writing**
- **“Fix-It” station**

- **Current events station**
- **Writing center**
- **Video tape/Audio tapes**
- **CD Roms**
- **Science lab activities**
- **Art/Music activities that align**
- **Ongoing projects**

Potential Anchoring and Options Activities

Journals

Webquests

Writers Workshop

**Spelling and
Vocabulary Words**

Computer Software

Independent Reading

Math Facts

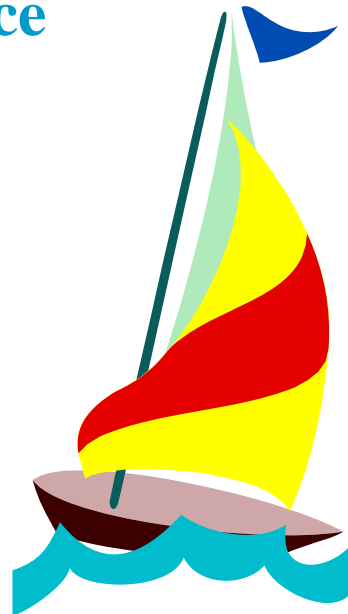
Listening Center

Peer Review



The Role of Anchoring Activities:

- Support Small Group Teaching
- Permit Differentiation
- Foster Self-Regulatory Behaviors
- Teach Time Management
- Provide Additional Practice



Characteristics of Good Anchoring Activities:

- Independent Learning Level
 - Meaningful
 - Respectful
 - Supportive
- Routine Based
- Introduced Gradually
- Limited Preparation Time
 - Varied

Monitoring the Activity of FSGs

- Develop rules for small group learning
- Develop self-regulatory behaviors



Monitoring the Progress of FSGs

■ **TEACHER-DIRECTED**

- ◆ **Teacher checklists**
- ◆ **Rubrics**
- ◆ **Conferences**
- ◆ **Interviews**

■ **STUDENT-DIRECTED**

- ◆ **Self-assessment**
- ◆ **Individual charts to monitor progress**
- ◆ **Audio tapes**
- ◆ **Student logs or journals**
- ◆ **Partner checks**

Student Self-Assessment Questions

- What have I done?
- How well did I do each task?
- Did I stick to the task?
- If I did the task again, what would I do differently? Why?
- What new question do I want to research?
- How do I feel about what I've done?
- Did I follow directions?
- Did I work without disturbing others?
- Did I help others? If so, how?
- Was I independent in my work?
- Did I recheck my work?
- What aspect of my work makes me most proud?



Record Keeping



- Interviews/Conferences
- Observation Check Sheets
- “Seating Charts”
- Clipboards and Post-It® notes
- Other?

Record Keeping: Observation Check Sheets

Performance Standard: _____

Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-

Record Keeping: Clip Board and Post-Its



Myth 4: Role of the STUDENT

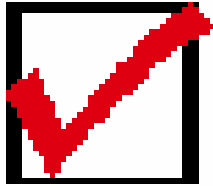
- In widely disparate groupings, the high achiever tends to spend most of the group's time answering questions or explaining



Robinson, A. (1991). *Cooperative learning and the academically talented student*. Storrs: CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented

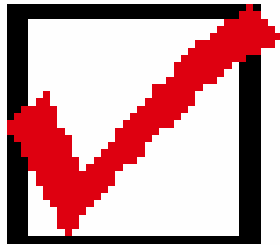
Myth 5: Grouping at the Secondary Level

Differences among students at the **high school** level—when compared to the differences among elementary students--are:



- Greater than,
- Less than,
- The same as

Myth 6: Prevalence of FSGs



- **Always**
- **Sometimes**
- **Occasionally**
- **Never**

Robinson, A. (1991). *Cooperative learning and the academically talented student*. Storrs: CT: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented

The Classroom Observation Study

“Across five subject areas and 92 observation days, observed students experienced no instructional or curriculum differentiation in 84% of their instructional activities.”

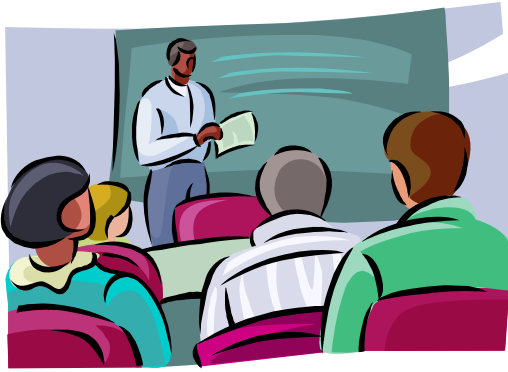
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1993, 2003

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History repeats itself. Which may explain why it's so boring.

Which of these grouping formats is used for 90-95% of all teaching and learning activities? What should the percentage be? Why?



Prerequisites for Success With FSGs

- **Debunk myths**
- **Administrative and technical support**
- **Teacher self-efficacy**
- **Clear and consistent management procedures**
- **Gradual introduction coupled with an orientation**
- **Debriefings, teacher reflections and accompanying modifications**
- **Experience and evidence of success**
- **Variety in grouping purposes**
- **Availability of different kinds of monitoring techniques**
- **Teacher tolerance for movement and sound**



The Acid-Test for Flexible Small Group Activities



Are the activities related to the learning goal?

Does the activity lend itself to a small group setting?

Does the activity provide for differentiation?

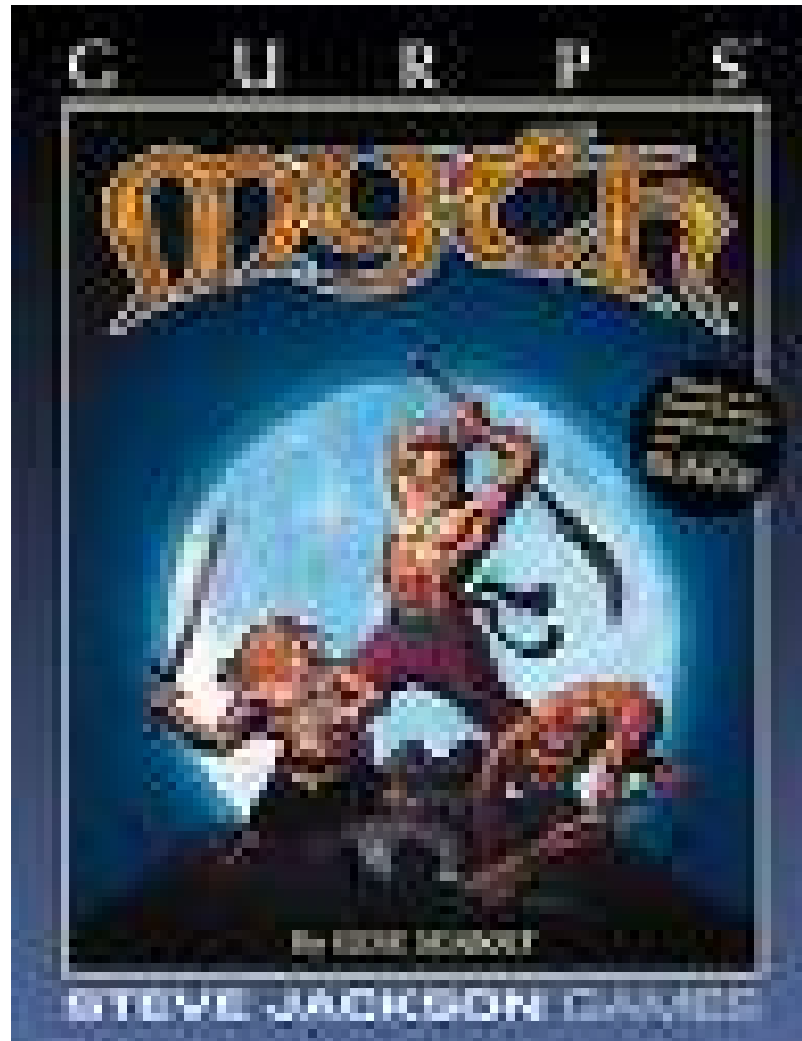
Is it motivating and appealing?

Is it at the appropriate level of challenge?

Is it too disruptive?

Can the work be documented and analyzed?

OTHER MYTHS?



Resources

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Resources

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Grading: It's the "System"

- **How do learners benefit from a grading system that reminds everyone that students with disabilities or who speak English as a second language do not perform as well as students without either condition?**
- **What do we gain by telling our most able learners that they are "excellent" w/r/t a standard that requires little effort, calls for no intellectual risk, and demands that they develop few academic coping skills?**
- **In what ways do our current grading practices motivate struggling or advanced learners to persist in the face of difficulty?**
- **Is there an opportunity for the struggling learner to encounter excellence in our current grading practices?**
- **Is there an opportunity for our advanced learners to struggle in our current grading practices?**