Grouping strategies

There are several different ways to organise students into groups. Below are just a few of them. Regardless of the method you use, effective learning in groups must have at least the following elements:

- The work must involve every member of the group.
- Each person has a valid job to perform and is aware of their individual and group goals.
- Each member is invested in completing the task or learning goal.
- Each member is accountable both individually and collectively.

Random grouping

Random groups are when new groups are assigned for a task and where the assignment of these groups is done randomly. There are many benefits to using random grouping including:

- Students become agreeable to work in any group they are placed in.
- Social barriers within the classroom are eliminated.
- Transfer of knowledge between students increases.
- Learning engagement and motivation are enhanced.

This is a useful strategy when your focus is on forming groups of equal size.

Techniques for forming random groups or pairs

Numbered heads together

Allocate each student in the class a number. Use the numbers to align with the number of groups you want to form. For example, if you want to form 5 groups, use numbers 1-5.

Invite students with the same number to form a group.

This technique can be varied using colours, playing cards, coloured post-it notes etc.

Eyeball partners

When students are seated at tables or in groups, 'eyeball partners' are students who are facing in front of each other.

Shoulder partners

When students are seated at tables or in groups, 'shoulder partners' are students who are seated next to each other. This may also be done when students are seated in rows.

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Achievement or ability grouping

Students with similar achievement levels or academic strengths are placed in the same group. This strategy enables the teacher to differentiate instruction, tasks, resources and levels of support. The size of the groups may vary depending on levels of student readiness.

Mixed ability grouping

Students with different levels of ability are placed into one group. This grouping strategy allows students to learn from each other's differences and actively interact with diverse individuals, while at the same time sharing their unique abilities and interests.

Social (cooperative) grouping

Each member of a group is assigned a different role in order to give them the opportunity to practise specific social skills.

Interest grouping

Students are assigned to a group or assign themselves to a group based on their interest in particular topics of study.

Skill/strategy grouping

Here, you group together students who need practice with a specific skill or strategy.

Student choice grouping

Allow students to group themselves according to a shared preference, for an author or genre in reading, for example, or historical period or country in social studies. This grouping system is good to use when student success is not dependent on choice, when you want students to take the lead.

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