Grouping for Literacy Learning

What Have We Learned About What Works When?

Assignment of children to “traditional” ability groups as the predominant form of instruction does not enhance achievement in reading.

- continued low rates of performance by children in lowest performing groups
- increasing gap between the children in high and low performing groups

Children in low-performing ability groups received qualitatively different instructional experiences:

- read half as many in-context words
- had fewer opportunities to write
- were asked fewer critical thinking questions
- had fewer opportunities for discussion

Large amounts of time in whole class instruction also fails to offer children adequate instructional support.

- Rates of performance similar to those for ability-grouped children.
Studies of different forms of flexible grouping indicate:

- Higher performance in reading vocabulary, reading comprehension, and reading fluency for all levels of readers
- Achievement of grade-level proficiency by low-performing readers
- Acquisition and use by low-performing readers of discussion strategies generally associated with higher-performing learners

In successful models:

- Struggling readers were not expected to contend with difficult text on their own
  - Teacher read alouds
  - Opportunities for individual and paired re-readings, intensive instruction and practice in word study
  - Practice reading easy text
  - Pull-out instruction in direct support of the classroom activities
  - In-class support directly related to regular education tasks. In some studies
- Able readers were provided daily opportunities to read text at more challenging levels and, in some cases, opportunities
to serve as peer or cross-age tutors.
- Different forms of grouping were used to meet different instructional goals

Grouping for reading instruction is important to meet children’s individual learning needs.

BUT the type of grouping matters...

Multiple groups are necessary to meet children’s full range of literacy needs.
Becoming a successful reader and writer requires the development of multiple literacies.

- the ability to read words quickly and fluently
- the knowledge of language and concepts necessary to construct meaning as one reads
- the knowledge of comprehension strategies necessary to recall, elaborate and clarify, summarize, and evaluate what is read

Different instructional experiences and a variety of texts support different literacies.

- Frequent practice with easy, readable text builds word knowledge and fluency.
- Experiences with stories that are rich and complex in both language and event structures support development of oral and written language.
- Experiences in group and individual contexts support different types of response to literature

A Typical Day in a Flexibly Grouped Classroom

- Community Reading
  - Time each day when children read (or listen to) grade-appropriate text
- Just Right Reading
  - Time each day when children receive instruction in text that will support the development of particular word level and comprehension strategies
- On Your Own Reading
  - Time each day when children read anything of their own choosing

Community Reading

- Story Introduction (Whole Class)
  - Preview text, develop background knowledge, make predictions
- Reading the Selection (Needs-Based Groups)
  - No Help
  - With Help (Teacher-led Group)
    - Silent reading
    - Partner rereading
    - Partner response
    - Individual response
  - Rereading with teacher or partner
  - Group Response (oral)
  - Individual Response (Written)
- Responding to the Selection (Small Groups)
  - e.g., Book Club (Raphael & McMahon, 1997)
Just Right Reading

- Supporting Struggling Readers
  - Instruction in word level strategies using easy text
  - Reading and rereading of easy books
- Supporting Average and Above Average Readers
  - Instruction in word level and comprehension strategies using grade-level text or above

On Your Own Reading

- Children read a book or text of their own choosing
- Children may read individually or in pairs
- Teacher may intervene if child consistently or repeatedly chooses books too easy or too difficult

Managing Flexible Groups

- Establish reliable and consistent daily literacy routines
- Provide demonstration and guided practice in strategies that children will be expected to use on their own or with a partner
- Create centers where students can work when assignments are completed
- Observe children closely at all times, and intervene briefly and strategically to maintain high levels of engagement

Resources and Materials

- LOTS of books at all levels of difficulty
- LOTS of instructional time for reading
- LOTS of knowledge about how children learn to read and write
- LOTS of attention to the daily routine of Community Reading, Just Right Reading, and On Your Own Reading
What Counts as Evidence of Success?

- Running records provide documentation of children’s fluency at the word level.
- Retellings provide information about:
  - comprehension
  - organization of recall
  - discourse styles
  - elaboration and clarification

- Book Talks provide documentation of:
  - comprehension
  - oral language
  - participation styles

- Writing samples provide documentation of:
  - phonemic awareness
  - spelling
  - comprehension
  - grammatical understanding

Effective Literacy Programs

- high expectations for all children
- participation at least part of the time in “regular” curriculum
- instruction in contexts other than whole group
- lots of time spent reading
- for students who struggle, supplemental instruction in easier text 20-30 minutes per day, 3-5 days per week
- systematic instruction in word study & comprehension
- integration of instruction in reading and writing
- strong professional development program for teachers
- home/school collaboration