

Cluster Grouping

What it is: When 3 to 8 students with like or similar gifts and talents are intentionally placed in the same mixed-ability classroom, it is known as cluster grouping. In schools where there is more than one section of a grade, class assignments have traditionally been made to create balanced heterogeneous rooms that take into consideration ability, gender, interpersonal dynamics, and individual student needs. Cluster grouping offers an effective alternative to this practice.

Benefits:

- Is low-cost and cost-effective
- Represents an inclusionary model, so provides continuous programming within the classroom
- Makes classroom diversity manageable as it reduces the range of student needs
- Provides opportunity for students with gifts and talents to interact with ability/talent peers, as well as age peers, on a regular basis
- Improves achievement levels of all students (Gentry, 1996)
- Has positive impact on social and affective needs of students with gifts and talents (Schuler, 1997)
- Results in new student role models and leaders emerging in non-cluster classrooms (Gentry, 1996)

Situations where the strategy is useful:

- In schools where there is more than one section of a grade
- In schools that want to maintain heterogeneous classrooms

Examples:

- Schoolwide Cluster Grouping Model (SCGM) (Winebrenner & Brulles, 2008)

Pointers:

- Consider developing a policy on cluster grouping, including the criteria that will be used for placement.
- Rotate the G/T cluster teacher every few years.
- Make sure that G/T cluster teachers are prepared to meet the needs of high ability, high potential students. Provide appropriate professional learning opportunities and collaborative support.
- Assign high achieving students that are not identified as those with gifts and talents in a non-G/T cluster classroom. This helps provide academic leadership in all classrooms.

Pointers (continued):

- Continue to use flexible grouping in G/T cluster classrooms to provide students opportunities to work with others of similar abilities, interests, and learning styles.
- Continue to differentiate in G/T cluster classrooms. The most common differentiation strategies in these situations are: increasing complexity of content; accelerating pace; and compacting.

References/Resources

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