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## Best grouping practices for reading instruction

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## Best grouping practices for reading instruction

### Abstract

In this project, teachers learned about the most effective type of grouping for reading instruction through a year long series of inservices. The purpose of this project was to focus in on the impact of flexible grouping and how to keep students engaged during small group reading time. Research for this project was gathered from professional articles and books about literacy and the role of a literacy coach. Flexible grouping was found to be the most effective type of reading instruction when used correctly. Flood, Lapp, Flood, and Nagel (1992) stated that flexible groups are flexible if: (a) you choose the most appropriate basis for grouping, (b) you choose the most effective format, and (c) you choose the most appropriate materials. Literacy centers are effective for all students when implemented correctly. Ford and Opitz (2002) stated that students will see themselves as independent readers when the centers are appropriate for them.

# BEST GROUPING PRACTICES FOR READING INSTRUCTION

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Division of Literacy Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by:

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This Project by Stacia Ann Weisskopf

Titled: BEST GROUPING PRACTICES FOR READING INSTRUCTION

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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## Introduction

“For over a century, researchers, teachers, administrators, and policymakers have discussed and debated the best way to group students for reading instruction” (Barr, 1995; Kulik & Kulik, 1987; Slavin, 1987 as cited in Moody & Vaughn, 1997, p.1). Teachers are either using whole group, small groups, or flexible groups. If teachers are grouping students then they need to decide whether to use homogeneous or heterogeneous groups. All students learn differently. Teachers need to make the decision on what type of instruction would benefit all students, while at the same time giving all students the opportunity to be exposed to the same curriculum and concepts. Whole group instruction leaves teachers wondering if they are meeting the needs of all students. Research has found ability groups label low students and flexible groups enhance student learning through using a variety of grouping patterns (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992). Many strategies have been implemented in the past, but what is the best way to group students for reading instruction today?

### *Rationale for Choosing Topic*

Everyday I looked out into the eyes of my students and wondered if I was doing the best job I could. I doubted myself when I looked at quarter tests, Phonemic Awareness Tests (PAT), and Basic Reading Inventory (BRI). During my instruction half of my students were not paying attention. I began to wonder about how many of my students received appropriate instruction. I wondered how I could teach students the skills they needed while at the same time challenging others. The only way to give students what they needed was to differentiate instruction. That is why I decided to



research the most effective approaches to grouping students for reading instruction.

### *Purpose of Study*

My purpose in performing this study is mirrored by the work of Ganske, Monroe, and Strickland (2003) who performed a study asking teachers to share the three most pressing questions about working with struggling readers and writers by filling out a survey. Teachers teaching one year, five years, and fifteen years all shared the same frustration. That was how to work with different levels and abilities of students within their classroom. Whole group is easy planning and management. Small groups provide appropriate instruction, but students do not move groups and management is difficult. Flexible groups provide appropriate instruction when students are constantly being regrouped. If small groups or flexible groups are the answer, then does gender or ethnicity play a role? This left me wondering what is the best way to group students for reading instruction?

### *Importance of Topic*

Students enter kindergarten with a wide range of abilities and it is the teacher's job to promote reading achievement for all students (McCoach, O'Connell, & Levitt, 2006). With the No Child Left Behind Act a major thrust in education is literacy. No Child Left Behind has left educators searching for the best strategies to use. NCLB demands the use of "scientifically" based teaching approaches. Many schools are seeking help through Reading First. Reading First Schools are implementing research-based strategies for the five components considered essential for a comprehensive reading program. The five components are: vocabulary, phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency,

and comprehension. This comprehensive reading program involves teaching students in whole group, small groups, flexible groups, and individually. With the increased emphasis on schools to provide successful reading instruction, the importance of using the most effective form of instructional grouping is also increased.

### *Terminology*

I will define a number of terms to help with clarity and understanding.

*Homogeneous grouping* is a way of organizing students into small or large groups according to ability, which is typically determined by informal assessments, teacher judgments, or standardized test scores (Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000).

*Heterogeneous groupings* are student groups organized to represent mixed-abilities (Schumm et al.). *Flexible groups* vary according to the purpose for which they are established. The group task or purpose determines how large they are, what materials are used, and who the groups contain (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992).

### *Research Questions*

My research question was derived from my personal interest based on my own practice. I wanted to know what more I could do to improve students' learning. This paper is based on one primary question: What is the most effective type of grouping for reading instruction? This primary question is further defined by two secondary questions: (a) What is the impact of flexible grouping? (b) How can a teacher keep students engaged the entire time during small group reading time?

## Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to explain my methodology for designing a year-long series of professional development workshops on groupings for reading. I have been teaching for six years and each year I have struggled with which approach or approaches were the best. This frustration is what led me to begin my research on grouping. After deciding to publish my findings as a series of teachers' workshops, I thought about my goals. First, I wanted my workshop to relate to my research questions. Second, I wanted the workshop to provide information for why teachers should use a balanced grouping approach for reading. My literature review provided me with information that I used in my workshop.

### *Literature Review*

I used several resources to gather information on groupings for reading including talking with my professors at University of Northern Iowa, talking with my colleagues, using information from Reading First inservices, and searching professional databases. After gathering sources, I read them and constantly referred back to what I wanted to know about grouping students for reading instruction. Information was obtained from a variety of resources. The sources I chose needed to relate to my research questions by providing me with information for why I should group students in a certain way. The University of Northern Iowa's Rod Library electronic data bases were the primary source for most of my journal articles. I drew from PsycARTICLES, Education Full-Text, and Academic Search Premier databases. I also used articles provided through South Tama County Community School District's Reading First inservice. Finally, I researched the

AEA267 website where I found professional texts. I used search terms such as *heterogeneous grouping, homogeneous grouping, ability grouping, flexible grouping, reading instruction, whole class instruction, gender, boys and girls, and ethnicity*. I focused on studies that were performed in whole group, fixed-ability small groups, and flexible small groups.

### *Workshop Design*

The original professional development plan at South Tama County Elementary School for the 2008-2009 school year was to focus on vocabulary. This plan was set aside when my school made the School in Need of Assistance (SINA) list for math. The decision was made by my administrators that math needed to be the focus for the whole year. I felt teachers were still confused with how to teach reading and that is why I decided to go on with designing my workshop. At some point in the future the focus will be on reading again, and I am hoping my administrators will allow me to present this workshop.

I designed a multigrade workshop that contained four inservices for one year. Each inservice lasted six hours. Before I began planning each inservice I researched adult learning. Vogt and Shearer (2007) explained how literacy coaches have an important role in reading instruction. The description of that role changes from school to school. Literacy coaches can have advanced degrees, preparation from professional development, or be an English teacher. I felt my classes at the University of Northern Iowa qualified me to have the preparation from the courses to be a literacy coach. Guided by the text *The Literacy Coach: Guiding in the Right Direction* (Puig & Froelich, 2007) I discovered

how to effectively teach adults and how to support the teachers between inservices. Puig and Froelich listed several guiding principles for a literacy coach to be efficient and effective. Here are a few that I felt pertained to me as a literacy coach at my school. An effective literacy coach: (a) must have a clear understanding of the features of a lesson and the benefits to the students, (b) must always provide a productive argument through layers of complexities, (c) knows that relationship building needs to be a top priority, (d) scaffolds colleagues on a contingency basis, (e) teaches students on a daily basis, (f) avoids a “preaching to the choir” syndrome, and (g) understands that a teacher’s need will override the coach’s personal passions. These principles helped me support the teachers during and between inservices. They also helped me to assure that each inservice was productive by stating objectives without preaching. Finally the principles made me realize that I needed to scaffold my teachers as much as needed and that I needed to make time to teach in the classrooms on a daily basis.

My next step involved fitting my workshop design into the context of South Tama Elementary. I took into account existing schedules and programs. I thought the teachers could relate to teaching small groups with the new reading series. My job was to show them how to make the existing groups they had flexible. Then I focused on what to do with the students who were not meeting with the teacher in a small group. Traditional classrooms often used workbooks and worksheets (Durkin, 1978-1979; Ford, 1991, as cited in Ford & Optiz, 1992). I provided examples of literacy centers to keep students actively engaged. The 45 minute common planning time was utilized for conferencing. I also set up times to come into the classroom to observe and teach lessons. South Tama

had the materials and framework set up for me to easily incorporate my workshop.

## Review of the Literature

Grouping practices are among the most important issues in reading instruction. Included in the questions about grouping practices are whole group, fixed small groups, flexible groups, homogeneous groups, and heterogeneous groups. Then there is the question about what to do with the rest of the students while the teacher is meeting with a small group. Teachers must use a variety of whole group and flexible groups to effectively reach all learners. What is the difference between small groups and flexible groups? Veteran teachers even say that using small groups today is what they called ability grouping years ago. Every type of teaching instruction has pros and cons. How do teachers know what type of instruction is best for their students? These are the questions that will be addressed here. I will begin by reviewing what strategies have been taught in the past. I will then explain whole group instruction and ability grouping and the effects they have on all students. Then I will explain flexible grouping and go into detail about homogeneous and heterogeneous groups and ways to group. Next I will state what researchers have to say about the issues of gender, English as a second language (ESL) and low socioeconomic status (SES) and their relationship to questions of groupings. I will end with how to make centers effective for all learners.

### *History*

Various sorts of instructional groups have been considered good and effective at different times throughout the history of reading instruction (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992). Some veteran teachers believe reading instruction is simply renamed and introduced to them as the new reading instruction. “In the 1940's, ability groups were

seen as good for ‘slow’ children, but bad for ‘bright’ ones” (Otto, 1950, as cited in Flood et al., p. 609). Flood et al. explained that eventually ability grouping was necessary for “gifted” students, too. “Ability groups, in spite of any controversy, remained the primary grouping strategy through the 1980's” (Flood et al., p. 609). Teachers today are confused with the type of reading instruction they are actually using. Some think they are using flexible groups when their groups are actually fixed. Some teachers also believe there is only one way to group students.

### *Whole Group*

Whole group reading instruction means all students are taught in one group. The focus is on uniformity, rather than on the diversity (Lou, Abrami, & Spence, 2000). Schumm, Moody, and Vaughn (2000) performed a study on twenty-nine third grade teachers to see if one type of reading instruction works for all students. Through interviews the study indicated that twenty-one of the teachers used whole class instruction. The reasons were because of limited materials and what they perceived was a school decision. The interviews discovered that not only had the traditional three-ability grouping configuration disappeared, but differentiated instruction for students of varying reading levels had vanished, as well. Whole class, undifferentiated instruction was the norm (Schumm et al.). This study did not answer how students perform in a class where no differentiated instruction is used. So, another study was performed with the same teachers to answer that question. A norm referenced achievement test was used to compare student scores in the fall and spring. Student progress varied depending on each student’s level. Above average students made substantial progress in decoding and



comprehension. Average-achieving students made growth in decoding, but much less progress was gained in comprehension. Low-achieving and LD students made minimal progress in both decoding and comprehension. This study also discovered that students' self-concept about themselves and their reading declined with the use of whole group reading. Schumm et al. believe that teachers need to provide more than one type of reading instruction for all students. They need to provide intense and explicit instruction that will meet the needs of all students.

While whole group instruction as a stand-alone practice may have drawbacks, Lou, Abrami, and Spence (2000) state that there are several reasons that exist for using whole class instruction. First, uniformity of instruction allows teachers to spend preparation time on developing a single set of instructional materials rather than developing many sets. A lot of preparation time is saved. It is very easy for teachers to develop only one set of materials. Second, whole class instruction means that teachers may emphasize a single set of instructional objectives for all students, objectives that are sometimes encountered in a required or core curriculum. All students need to be exposed to grade level objectives. Whole group instruction meets that requirement. Third, teachers may use their content and pedagogical expertise to explain new material orally to all students. Direct instruction is used by the teacher for all students. Students are able to demonstrate their understanding through seatwork. Fourth, students may be motivated by tangible or symbolic incentives to learn provided by the teacher, which sometimes place students in competition with one another to excel. Peer competition can be the best motivator. Students may surprise teachers when they have the chance to perform at the

same level as every one else in the class. High functioning students are motivators for struggling students. Fifth, whole class instruction means all students may be exposed to the same learning opportunities, emphasizing open, democratic principles of the educational system and the realities of life in a “survival of the fittest” world. Students need to be prepared in school for how they will be treated when they are looking for jobs. People are all treated the same and expected to have the same job performance.

### *Fixed Small Groups*

The practice of using fixed small groups refers to the process of teaching students in groups that are grouped by achievement, skill, or ability level (McCoach, O’Connell, & Levitt, 2006). There are many studies that argue against fixed small groups. “Over 700 studies have been done in the past 50 years on tracking and ability grouping, and the majority of the research says not to do it. Even so, some estimates say up to 85% of today’s schools still group students for instruction this way” (DiMartino & Miles, 2005, p. 10). They believe that students do not do better when ability grouped. A common argument against ability grouping is that teachers develop lower expectations for students in the lower ability groups. Teachers worry that students in the low groups will fall further and further behind their peers. Most teachers believe these students will never have the opportunity to move into higher ability groups.

Flood, Lapp, Flood, and Nagel (1992) researched to find out how to group students for reading instruction. They found fixed small groups have many negative effects on struggling students. “Ability groups are negative for struggling readers, because the process of grouping in this way labels and sorts them into indelible

hierarchies” (Allington, 1980, as cited in Flood et al., p. 609). Struggling readers read more words out loud, they are expected to do more drill work in skill materials, they have less exposure to works of literature, and they do far less silent reading than children assigned to high groups (Cook-Gumperz, Simons, & Gumperz, 1981, as cited in Flood et al.). Ability groups were favored in the past, but now there is evidence of the negative impact it can have on struggling readers (Flood et al.). Teachers must realize this and change the way they teach.

### *Flexible Small Groups*

Flexible groups vary according to the purpose for which they are established. Who they contain, how large they are, and what materials are used are determined each time by what the group task or purpose is (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992). Research indicates that more effective teachers work with small groups more often than less effective teachers do (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000 as cited in Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003). These groups need to be flexible (Opitz, 1998 as cited in Duke & Bennett-Armistead). Duke and Bennett-Armistead explain how children should not be placed in the same group all year, but they should move depending on their strengths and progress. Programs should include varied direct reading instruction and language arts instruction with the whole class as well as in small flexible, guided groups (Fountas & Pinnell 1996, 2001 as cited in Bukowiecki, 2007).

Flood, Lapp, Flood, and Nagel (1992) described an example of flexible grouping in a third grade classroom. Students were able to choose what reader’s theater they wanted to read, but the teacher chose what part they were going to read. The teacher took

into consideration the reading level of each student. This study found that each activity demands attention for matching each student's needs with groups and materials. Success happens if the teacher chooses the most appropriate basis for grouping, the most effective format, and the most appropriate materials. The idea of using flexible within-class groups needs to be clear to all teachers. Ganske, Monroe, and Strickland (2003) describe small groups as successful because teachers can keep students focused and monitor behaviors and instructional adjustment such as regrouping. This can happen whether flexible groups are homogeneous or heterogeneous.

McCoach, O'Connell, and Levitt (2006) performed a study in a kindergarten classroom on within-class ability grouping. Students labeled as learning disabled or that had limited English were not included. Students were chosen if they remained in the same school across the base year. Early literacy and reading skills were assessed using item response theory scaled cognitive assessments. This assessment was given in the fall and spring. They found that schools which had full day kindergarten and teachers who had a high use of ability groups had higher gains. These ability groups were not fixed. The ability groups were successful because of the following: (a) differentiation within groups and (b) regrouping based on certain need or content area. Students benefited from the flexible groups.

Students can also be put into flexible groups using data from district or state assessments. Valencia and Buly (2004) suggest that teachers analyze test scores and categorize students into one of the following clusters: automatic word callers, struggling word callers, word stumblers, slow comprehenders, slow word callers, and disabled

readers. This allows teachers to put students into flexible, small groups. Some students are not ready for phonics and others are not ready for fluency instruction. According to Valencia and Buly struggling readers need guided practice to apply strategies to different levels of material through small group instruction. Students may be able to master a skill after receiving additional help only a few times a week. Each skill taught is going to have a different group of students.

Flexible small groups and whole group instruction are very powerful when used together. Teachers who use whole group instruction often pull small groups for more intensive instruction for students who are having difficulty learning a skill (Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000). Not all students would be put in flexible groups. These groups would only be formed for that specific skill taught that day. The groups would constantly be changing due to teachers' observations during whole group instruction. The flexible small groups may only be used three times a week for ten to fifteen minutes as interventions (O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmer, 2005). This would give students more opportunities to learn the same curriculum, but at a slower pace.

Flexible grouping is complex for teachers because it requires them to understand students' prior knowledge, readiness for learning, monitoring progress, and classroom management (Moody & Vaughn, 1997). Classroom management sometimes influences teachers to use whole group instruction because it saves on time, planning, and discipline (Moody & Vaughn). Moody and Vaughn stress how important it is for teachers to keep groups flexible so students are not always in the same groups. Teachers need to realize that the most effective approach to reading is not always the easiest to plan.

*Other Grouping Formats*

Students can be grouped many different ways depending on whether the teacher wants the groups to be homogeneous or heterogeneous. Homogeneous groups are students who are organized into small groups according to reading level determined by informal assessments, teacher judgment, and/or standardized test scores (Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000). Heterogeneous groups are when students are organized to represent mixed-abilities (Schumm et al.). Teachers use a variety of assessments and observations to group students. Teachers regroup students for different skill areas.

Flood, Lapp, Flood, and Nagel (1992) include basis, format, and materials as variables in making decisions about grouping. For each of these variables, they go on to describe sub-categories:

1. Among the factors which might be considered as the basis for forming groups, Flood, et al, included (a) skills development, (b) interest, (c) work habits, (d) prior knowledge of content, (e) prior knowledge of strategies, (f) task/activity, (g) social, (h) random, and (i) student choice.
2. Possible formats for groups included (a) individuals, (b) dyads, (c) small groups of 3-4, (d) larger groups of 7-10, (e) half-class, and (f) whole group.
3. In considering the materials that might be used in various groupings, the authors listed (a) same materials for all groups, (b) different levels of materials with similar theme, (c) different themes within a topic, and (d) different topics. (p. 610)

Duke and Bennett-Armistead (2003) also suggest six types of groupings

that may be useful with informational text in primary classrooms:

(a) Interest-based grouping. Students are grouped according to a common interest. Certain students might all be interested in the same hobby or culture. (b) Needs-based grouping. Students are grouped to practice a certain strategy or skill. (c) Level-based grouping. Students are grouped according to reading level. Groups are flexible because students read at different levels depending if the material is fiction or nonfiction. (d) Topic-based grouping. Students are grouped according to content-area topics. (e) Author's craft grouping. Students are grouped to study a particular aspect of the author's craft. A book chosen may focus on captions or diagrams. (f) Random grouping. This is when there is no criteria in mind. Students could be divided alphabetically, with grouping cards, or by drawing numbers. (p. 80-82)

### *Gender*

Some research indicates that teachers can increase student achievement by focusing on gender-based instructional strategies (Costello, 2008). Costello cites the U.S. Department of Education report (n.d.) that boys are roughly 1.5 years behind girls in reading skills at all school levels. "In every age group, boys have been scoring lower than girls annually for more than three decades on U.S. Department of Education reading tests" (Costello, p.50). Costello offers the following three reading strategies to improve the scores of boys. First, teachers should use brain research to inform them about gender-based instructional strategies. This is a good way to learn how males and females process

information. Second, teachers need to offer boy-friendly reading material. Boys enjoy reading nonfiction, action stories, and magazines. Third, teachers need to provide single gender reading activities within the classroom. Boys and girls do not have the same reading tastes. Girls often dominate book discussions, leaving boys with nothing to say. Boys who have less-developed verbal skills would have extra time to formulate their thoughts, which leads to more opportunities to participate in discussions. Important reading activities for boys are literature circles, read-alouds, and projects. Fourth, teachers need to increase the use of male role models for reading. Many males view reading as an activity for females. Males are motivated when they see older males reading.

### *English As a Second Language*

If English as a Second Language (ESL) students have little background knowledge about U.S. customs and idioms, then they may have a harder time learning to read (Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland, 2003). It is possible that small group instruction rather than one-on-one instruction is better for ESL students because they are provided with more opportunities to learn the models of fluency, concepts presented in text, and vocabulary from their peers (Gersten & Jimenez, 1998 as cited in Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Kouzekanani, Bryant, Dickson, & Blozis, 2003).

Honigsfeld and Dove (2008) reviewed five possible co-teaching configurations to use in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom with a mainstream teacher and an ESL teacher:

- (a) One Group: Here both teachers take turn being the lead teacher while



the other one “teaches on purpose”. This allows the teacher to give about five minute mini lessons to individual or small groups of students. The teacher who is not being the lead teacher reteaches skills or concepts. (b) Two Groups: Two Teachers Teach Same Content. Students are divided into two heterogeneous groups, which allows the ESL students to interact with their peers in a small setting. (c) Two Groups: One Teacher Reteaches; One Teacher teaches alternate information. Students are assigned temporarily to one of the two groups based on skills. Groups change as skills change. (d) Multiple Groups: Two Teachers Monitor/Teach. This grouping allows students to receive instruction targeted at their needs while others are at learning centers. (e) One Group: Two Teachers Teach the Same Content. This grouping involves both teachers helping each other teach the same lesson. The ESL teacher provides examples and explanations to go along with what the mainstream teacher is saying. (p. 9)

Co-teaching allows the regular education teacher to learn successful strategies from the ESL teacher to use with ESL students. Keeping ESL students in the classroom gives them an opportunity to learn from the English language students.

#### *Low Socioeconomic Status*

O'Connor, Fulmer, Harty, and Bell (2005) performed a study on small groups that took place in two different socioeconomic (SES) schools. One school had a low SES population and the other was a university-affiliated laboratory school. Kindergarten

through third grade teachers participated in professional development, performed ongoing measurements of reading progress, and taught small group or individual instruction to students who were below grade level. The first year small group instruction was given to kindergarteners who did not make adequate achievement. Extra support was given to these students for ten to fifteen minutes three times a week. The second year small group instruction was provided for first graders who did not make adequate growth. They received extra support for twenty to twenty-five minutes three times a week. The third year provided extra support for second graders and the fourth year provided extra support for third graders. The study found that students attending the school located in a primarily low SES community consistently scored lower while in kindergarten and first grades than those attending the more affluent school. As these same students entered third grade, the outcome between the low SES school and the more affluent school narrowed. The authors concluded that early interventions in kindergarten through third grade improves reading ability. Learning gains across the schools were similar and students without disabilities in the low SES school were above the national average by the end of third grade (O'Conner et al.).

### *Literacy Centers*

Teachers often struggle with what to do with other students when they are meeting with small groups. The time students spend away from the teacher needs to be effective. Independent activities like cut and paste projects do not provide students with the same learning opportunities as if they were with the teacher (Ford & Opitz, 2002). Learning centers can be successful. Ford and Opitz believe there are five considerations

teachers need to know about to ensure success for their students. First, teachers need to know their students. They need to watch them to see what they can do independently and what needs to be taught. Second, teachers need to know how their students perform on assessments and function in small groups. Some students may need more practice with reading. Third, teachers need to consider state or district curricular expectations.

Designing centers around that curriculum will ensure that all students are exposed to the appropriate skills and concepts. Fourth, teachers need to know what is known about engagement in instructional settings. Students must be able to experience success. Fifth, teachers must make sure centers can be used independently, operate with minimal transition time and management concerns, have value for all learners, hold students accountable, are easily created, and build around class routines. Centers that would meet the criteria just discussed are listening post, readers theater, reading/writing around the room, pocket chart, poems/story packs, big books, responding through art, writing, and reading (Ford & Opitz).

My findings from the review of literature provided me with important content that I believe could benefit the teachers in my school. I have reasons for not using fixed small groups and positive results for using a balance of whole group and small flexible groups. I also know how to effectively keep all students engaged during small group instruction.

### The Inservice Sessions

Reading instruction in my school district has looked different for primary and intermediate teachers until recently. I have taught at South Tama for six years. I began teaching reading at this school by grouping students into pods. Reading was taught by using a basal series and trade books. Each grade level divided all the students up by ability. Students were placed into above level, on level, or below level groups depending on how they performed on assessments. Ten to eleven teachers were assigned to each grade level which made each pod have about nine to ten students. Teachers met monthly to discuss student progress. The monthly meetings allowed teachers to move students to other pods based on data. The intermediate teachers taught reading whole group. Trade books were the materials chosen. Associates were available some of the time to help. Three years ago major changes happened. The primary and intermediate buildings merged into one brand new one. Two new administrators were hired. A new reading series was also adopted by the entire elementary. The administrators decided that reading would now be taught in small groups with a co-teacher. We met with the representative from Macmillan McGraw-Hill to learn about all of the materials. We began to implement the new reading series in our classrooms.

Many teachers still had questions about how to group students. They wondered how many students to have in a group and how long to meet with each group. They also didn't know how to keep the other students actively engaged during small group time. The frustration and confusion of many teachers led me to believe that a professional development process focused on the best ways to group students for reading instruction

could help teachers to confidently teach reading. The rest of this chapter represents my efforts to design such a process.

The goal of these inservice sessions is to educate teachers on how to group for reading through a balanced approach. Teachers will learn through research, demonstrations, and application. Each inservice session will be devoted to one of the following topics: (a) whole group, (b) flexible versus fixed small groups, (c) centers, and (d) group variations (see Appendix A). Teachers will use the time between the inservices to implement the type of reading instruction they have learned.

There will be four full day sessions. The first session will address the overall plan for reading instruction and whole group instruction. The second session will address fixed small group and flexible groups. The third session will address literacy centers. The last session will discuss other ways to group students for reading instruction.

Elementary teachers from the South Tama County Community School District will participate in this inservice. This includes all preschool through fifth grade teachers. The inservices will be scheduled during the district's whole day inservices.

I referred to *The Literacy Coach: Guiding in the Right Direction* (Puig & Froelich, 2007) as to how I can professionally present to my district. Puig and Froelich stated that a critical factor in the transfer and application of knowledge is the relationship between the presenter and the audience. The presenter needs to remove any obstacles in the way. Puig and Froelich describe one way of removing obstacles is by using a common language. There must be an agreement between the presenter and the teachers when looking at reading instruction. Reviewing the past ways of teaching reading and looking

at how the new basal series recommends us to teach reading will help us agree on our goal for the inservice. Cambourne (1988), as cited in Pug and Froelich stated that demonstrations are necessary for literacy development. He also stated that demonstrations need to be continuous. Examples of lesson plans from my classroom along with demonstrating in each teacher's classroom will bring a better understanding to everyone (see Appendix B and C). A very important point Pug and Froelich discussed was that one or two teaching points are sufficient for each inservice. Teachers get confused and forget what they learned when too many points are brought up in one day. This is why each inservice is so specific with only one topic that starts with listing only two objectives. Combining all four inservices into one would cause confusion and frustration.

I made use of Pug and Froelich's (2007) schedule for a literacy coach to guide me through each inservice and the interims between each inservice. They created the following literacy coaching schedule for a 37.5-hour teacher week:

- (a) 40% of time is spent working with students, (b) 20% of the time is spent engaging in conversations with teachers and making observations,
- (c) 10% of the time is spent providing observation lessons, (d) 20% of the time is spent planning and preparing for training sessions, and (e) 10% of the time is spent engaging in professional book study. (p. 9)

Even though I am not formally a literacy coach I felt that was the role I would be fulfilling during this workshop and so I used those ideas when I planned for supporting teachers. I automatically thought of the 45 minute common planning time for each grade

level that we have in our school. I would use that time to meet with each teacher or grade level. I would set up a schedule for demonstrating a balanced approach to reading in each classroom. I would also set up a time for observing each teacher and designing lesson plans with each teacher. The rest of the time would be spent preparing and researching for the next inservice.

### *Overall Plan for Reading Instruction/ Whole Group Instruction (Session 1)*

The schedules for all four sessions can be found in Appendix A. Session one will begin with explaining the goals for reading instruction. Then teachers will learn how to effectively teach whole group reading. The purpose of the first day of this inservice will be two-fold. The first is to explain to teachers the direction we are heading towards with reading instruction. The second is to explain whole group reading instruction. The specific questions for this session include: (a) What does research say about whole group reading instruction, and (b) how do you teach whole group reading instruction?

To begin the inservice, teachers will watch a PowerPoint presentation on how reading used to be taught and how Macmillan McGraw-Hill recommends that we teach reading now (see Appendix D). Teachers will then have time to reflect and share things they want to learn at their tables. Then the schedule for all four sessions will be handed out so teachers can see what was expected of them (see Appendix A). After answering any questions or concerns we will go over the two objectives for today's session, which will be posted on the wall (see Figure 1).

The second objective to learn about in the first session is whole group reading instruction. They will begin by reading an article called *Grouping for reading*

*instruction: Does one size fit all?* (Schumm, Moody, & Vaugh, 2000). After reading the article they will fill out a summary sheet, which will be shared with others at the table (see Appendix E). Then a PowerPoint presentation will be presented to learn more about whole group reading instruction and how they will be expected to teach it in their classrooms (see Appendix F). The presentation will focus on the possible advantages and negative consequences of whole-group reading instruction.

Objectives for Session 1

1. Teachers will learn about research supporting a balanced approach to reading grouping for reading instruction.
2. Teachers will design lesson plans for whole group reading for one week.

*Figure 1.* In session one teachers will learn how to effectively use whole group reading instruction.

Before giving teachers the task of designing their own lesson plans, they will be shown an example to help clarify what is expected of them (see Appendix B). Teachers will then work with their grade level to design a lesson plan for one week on whole group reading instruction. I will rotate to each grade level to have teachers sign up for a time for me to observe and to teach a lesson to the class between session one and session two.

Session one will end with what is expected of them before session two. They will be responsible for completing a journal once a week on how they feel about whole group reading and if they feel the students are benefiting from it. Before leaving the teachers must fill out an exit slip stating one thing they learned and one thing they still want to learn more about. The exit slips will help me see who needs additional support from me before session two begins.



*Fixed Small Groups versus Flexible Groups (Session 2)*

The schedule for session two can be found in Appendix A. Session two will explain the difference between fixed small groups and flexible groups. The second day of these inservices will begin by explaining the two objectives posted on the wall (see Figure 2). Teachers will share what they want to learn more about from session one on whole group instruction.

Objectives for Session 2

1. Teachers will evaluate the difference between fixed small groups and flexible groups.
2. Teachers will implement flexible groups into the classroom.

*Figure 2.* In session two teachers will learn how to effectively use flexible groups for reading instruction.

Teachers will then be presented information on fixed small groups. They will begin to gain knowledge through reading the article *Am I allowed to group? Using flexible patterns for effective instruction* (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992). After reading the article they will fill out a summary sheet explaining their understanding that will be shared at their table (see Appendix E). Each table will share one thing they agreed with and one thing they disagreed with. This is a time when teachers can share how fixed small groups have benefited their students. Then they will view a PowerPoint containing important information about the history and negative effects of fixed small groups (see Appendix G). During this presentation, I will answer open questions and talk about various approaches that have been used. I will also address any concerns they have about flexible groups.

Next teachers will gain knowledge about flexible groups. They will read information about homogeneous and heterogeneous groups to see if students benefit from one group or another. They will also see how useful data can be in placing students in groups. They will review the following data currently used in our district: (a) Basic Reading Inventory (BRI), (b) Phonemic Awareness Test (PAT), (c) Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), (d) Fry words, and (e) basal assessments from Macmillan McGraw-Hill. They will see how to keep their groups flexible by constantly referring to data.

My district has a large student population of English as a Second Language (ESL) and low socioeconomic status (SES). That is why I felt part of this session needed to be devoted to those two areas. Keeping groups flexible is the goal for this inservice and teachers need to see that ESL and low SES students can succeed in that type of group. Teachers will gain knowledge through viewing a PowerPoint (see Appendix G).

After reviewing research on fixed small groups and flexible groups the teachers will show their understanding through the use of a Venn diagram. They will work at their tables to complete a Venn diagram. Then there will be a share out from each table. Through observation of this activity I will be able to see if they are ready to move on to the next task of designing a lesson plan for flexible groups.

Teachers will work with their grade level to design a lesson plan for one flexible group for one week. This group may have two to six students. They will have to identify the data they used to make their flexible group. They will meet with this same group everyday for one week. They need to decide what skills they are going to work on with these students. During this time I will rotate to each grade level to have teachers sign up

for a time for me to observe them and demonstrate a lesson in their classroom.

Session two will end with explaining the task teachers will have between session two and session three. They will have to write one summary a week on how flexible grouping is going in their classroom.

### *Centers (Session 3)*

Session three discusses ideas for literacy centers. The third day of these inservices will begin with explaining the two objectives posted on the wall (see Figure 3). The schedule for this session can be found in Appendix A. Teachers will then have time to share what they want to learn more about with whole group instruction and flexible groups.

#### Objectives for Session 3

1. Teachers will understand the different types of centers.
2. Teachers will implement centers into their classrooms.

*Figure 3.* In session three teachers will learn how to successfully implement centers into their classrooms.

Teachers will learn about the different types of centers, how to group students for centers, and how to implement centers through a PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix H). I will begin with presenting how centers used to be organized in classrooms. I will talk about how long students are away from the teacher and the worksheets and workbooks they used to be expected to complete. My next step will be to move into the structure of literacy centers. I will discuss five considerations for successful learning centers. I will go into detail about each consideration which involves knowing your learners, what skills they need to practice, state or district curricular expectations,

offering a variety of activities, and having expectations for centers. Then I will talk about nine centers that met the considerations we just discussed. I will give examples of student expectations for each of the following centers: listening post, readers' theater, reading/writing around the room, pocket chart, poems/story packs, big books, responding through art, writing, and reading. I will end with stating how centers need to be as purposeful and meaningful as the time they spend in their flexible group.

Before letting the teachers design their centers with their grade level I will share the types of centers I have in my classroom. I will begin by stating that my centers were designed by using Ford and Opitz's (2002) criteria for successful centers. I will let the teachers know they will be shown the criteria in my PowerPoint presentation. Next I will state my five centers of: reading, writing, making words, math, and project. Within each center the students have choices. The reading center lets the students read independently or with a partner, listen to a book on tape, read fry word phrases in a pocket chart, read poems, read big books, practice readers theaters, or read around the room with pointers. The writing center expectations changes each quarter. Students must write about the theme for the week from Macmillian McGraw-Hill. Once they have accomplished that they may write sentences to go with a picture they chose from a magazine or a picture they drew using stencils. First and second quarter students must write one sentence. Third quarter students must write three sentences. Fourth quarter students must write four sentences. This prepares them for the writing assessment taken three times a year. The making words center contains many manipulatives. Students may use rubber stamps or magnetic letters to practice spelling words or sight words. They may also play letter

bingo, sight word bingo, Fry word bingo, or ABC rainbow. Picture cards are available to sort by beginning sound, ending sound, vowel sound, digraphs, and blends. The math center contains counters for number identification, addition and subtraction cards, pattern blocks, dominoes, and games learned from the math series. This center is included because we are on the SINA list for math. The project center contains one art activity to make that goes along with the story or poem we read together for the week. Students are able to create how they feel about a story or poem through the use of art.

After viewing my centers, teachers will be provided with time to design centers with their grade level. During this work time I will rotate to each grade level to answer questions and have them sign up for an observation and conference time. The conference time will be used to help teachers design centers.

Session three will end with explaining the expectations before the next session. Teachers will be required to write a summary of how they implemented each center into their classroom.

#### *Other Ways to Group (Session 4)*

Session four will describe different ways to group students. The last day of these inservices will begin by reviewing the two objectives for this session (see Figure 4). The schedule for this session can be found in Appendix A. I will begin with asking teachers if there is anything more they want to learn about centers. Then teachers will briefly discuss if they are implementing effective grouping procedures for reading instruction.

Objectives for Session 4

1. Teachers will learn about group variations.
2. Teachers will implement an effective reading program

*Figure 4.* In session four teachers will learn about group variations and how to implement an effective reading program.

Teachers will refer to the article from session two *Am I allowed to group? Using flexible patterns for effective instruction* (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992) to learn about group variations. They will receive explanations for each group through the PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix I).

After viewing the PowerPoint, teachers will work with their grade level to design two groups using two different group variations learned. They will use a lesson plan (see Appendix J) to describe how students were grouped, materials each group used, and the format type chosen.

Next teachers will review knowledge gained in whole group, flexible groups, designing centers, and group variations. Teachers will work together at their tables to share information on each topic. Then each table will write one idea learned about each topic on chart paper. These ideas will be shared with the whole staff.

Now teachers will work with their grade level to design a balanced reading lesson plan. This lesson plan will have whole group and flexible groups. They will have to state what data they used to place students into groups and if any group variations were used. They also need to describe what centers they have in place. During this time I will go to each grade level to have teachers sign up for an observation and demonstration.

This inservice will end with any questions or concerns they might still have. The

teachers will be required to fill out a survey about how effective they felt the inservice was (see Appendix K). The results of the survey will help me to further guide the teachers during my scheduled meeting times with them.

## Results and Conclusion

This project was developed because of my interest in the best type of grouping for reading instruction. My school has tried different ways of reading instruction and teachers are still confused. My project helped me to see how to effectively teach reading groups for reading instruction. I was not able to implement this inservice because the focus at my school changed from reading to math. My school made the SINA list for math and we realized teachers needed support in math. I strongly believe that the teachers at my school would have benefited from my inservice if I would have had the opportunity to present it. The rest of this chapter will focus on my two secondary questions, limitations I came across, and recommendations based on my findings.

### *What is the impact of flexible grouping?*

The professional literature is quite clear that flexible grouping can be an effective grouping strategy to use with all students. It enhances teaching and learning. Each student's needs are met and there is an understanding. Groups are effective when teachers use a variety of grouping patterns (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992). There is no right or wrong way to group students. The key is to keep it flexible and not permanent. Flexible grouping is going to require teachers to constantly use data to regroup students. Students will be grouped based on skills or interests.

### *How do you keep students engaged the entire time during small group reading?*

The time that students spend away from the teacher can be successful. The time spent in literacy centers can be as powerful as the time students spend with the teacher. Teachers must learn how to create and implement centers that promote engaging and



successful literacy learning. Teachers must consider the following in order for learning centers to be successful: (a) know your students, (b) consider activities for each students, (c) consider district or state curricular expectations, (e) consider what is known about engagement in instructional settings, and (f) establish an infrastructure away from the teacher (Ford & Optiz, 2002). Ford and Opitz state that learning centers must set up children for success so they see themselves as independent readers. Flexible grouping can successfully be implemented when centers are appropriately designed for each student. Centers take a lot of time to prepare and design. It is important to take your time because centers are just as important as time spent with the teacher.

### *Limitations*

It was difficult to find recent information about fixed small groups, flexible groups, whole group, and centers. A lot of information I found was at least ten years old. It would have been nice to find information that was only about five years old. My results chapter had limitations. I was not able to present my inservice so my results chapter was combined with the conclusion chapter.

### *Recommendations*

Teachers should consider using a combination of whole group and flexible groups. All students need to be presented with grade level material during whole group reading time. Lou, Abrami, and Spence (2000) state that whole group reading allows all students to be exposed to the same instructional objectives and opportunities. Flexible groups is a time when students are reading independently. They increase their self-confidence and successfully use appropriate reading strategies. Teachers should study

professional literature to see how flexible groups are efficient when students are engaged in literacy centers. Whether all students go to each center or just stay at one center is up to the teacher. Centers are meaningful if there are tasks at each center appropriate for each student. Finding the balance between whole group and flexible groups and incorporating centers is the key to successful reading instruction.

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## Appendix A

## Grouping for Reading Instruction Inservice Schedule

## Session 1: Overall Plan for Reading Instruction/ Whole Group Instruction

8:00-8:15	Networking
8:15-8:30	Introduction and Objectives
8:30-9:00	Schedule for four inservices
9:00-9:45	How has our reading instruction changed? Review reading instruction of Macmillian McGraw-Hill
9:45-10:15	Read <i>Grouping for Reading Instruction: Does One Size Fit All?</i> (Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000)
10:15-10:30	Break
10:30-11:30	Whole Group Reading Approach
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:00	Example of Whole Group Reading Lesson Plan
1:00-2:45	Teacher Work Time Design one week of whole group reading Teachers sign up for demonstration and observation
2:45-3:00	Homework Journal once a week about whole group instruction

## Session 2: Fixed Small Groups versus Flexible Groups

8:00-8:15	Networking
8:15-8:30	Review Objectives
8:30-9:00	Read- <i>Am I allowed to group? Using flexible patterns for effective instruction.</i> (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992)
9:00-10:30	Ability and Flexible Groups Homogeneous and heterogeneous groups BRI, PAT, ITBS, Running Records, fry words, & basal assessments
10:30-10:45	Break
10:45-11:30	ESL and Low SES Students
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-12:45	Review Ability and Flexible Groups
12:45-2:30	Teacher Work Time Design one week of lesson plans for one flexible group Sign up for observation and demonstration
2:30-3:00	Homework

### Session 3: Centers

8:00-8:15	Networking
8:15-8:30	Objectives
8:30-9:30	Types of Centers
9:30-10:30	Implementing Centers
10:30-10:45	Break
10:45-11:30	Grouping Students for Centers
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:00	Sharing of My Classroom
1:00-2:45	Teacher Work Time Create Own Centers
2:45-3:00	Homework Journal once a week about how you implemented your centers

### Session 4: Other Ways to Group

8:00-8:15	Networking
8:15-8:30	Objectives
8:30-10:00	Group Variations
10:00-10:15	Break
10:15-11:30	Teacher Work Time Design two groups
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-12:45	Review Effective Reading Instruction Including centers and group variations
12:45-2:45	Design an Effective Reading Lesson Plan Include whole group, flexible groups, and centers
2:45-3:00	Questions and Concerns

## Appendix B

### Example of Whole Group Reading Lesson Plan

(Using our basal series)

- 8:35-8:45      Build Background- Talk about how you are special by looking at the picture prompt on p.6/7. Use the vocabulary words of unique and special.
- 8:45-8:55      Read Big Book- That Big Cat!
- Explain how to analyze story structure and character and setting by referring to page 7A.
  - Set purpose for reading p.7A
  - Think Aloud during the story p.7A & 7B
  - Respond to the literature with questions on p. 7B
- 8:55-9:00      Phonemic Awareness
- Rhyming p.7B
- 9:00-9:05      Phonics
- Introduce short a p.7C



## Appendix C

## Flexible Reading Group

Date \_\_\_\_\_

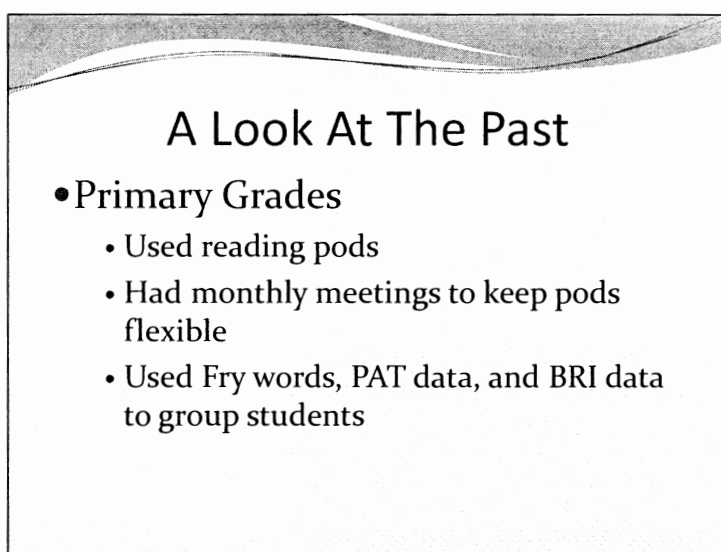
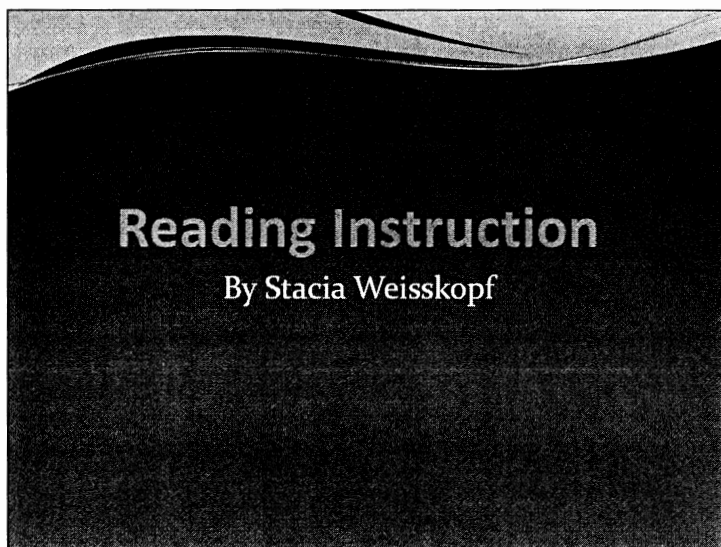
Students \_\_\_\_\_

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>Fry Words</b>	Unit 2 Word Card	Unit 2 Fry Word Phrases	Unit 2 Bingo	Unit 2 Phrases	Test Unit 2
<b>Phonemic Awareness</b>	P.35I Rhyming with photo cards for short a	P. 35M Phoneme Isolation with short a	p. 35Q Rhyme “Who Is That” Circle short a words	P. 35U Phoneme Blending Use sound boxes for short a words	P. 35Y Read short a sentences
<b>Phonics</b>	P. 35I Make short a words	P. 35M Make short a words	Sort short a words	P. 35U Add s to words	Write short a words
<b>Prereading Strategy</b>	Use short a families to decode words	Use short a families to decode words	Use short a families to decode words	Use short a families to decode words	Use short a families to decode words
<b>Read</b>	A Cap for Pam	Cat Can Jump	Cat Can Jump	Cat Can Jump	Cat Can Jump
<b>Running Record</b>	Ben	Sydney	Jose	Natalie	Chris
<b>Comprehension</b>	What kind of cap did Pam wear?	Does your cat act like the cat in the story?	P. 35R Analyze Characters	Talk about the characters and setting	What did you learn from Cat Can Jump?

Appendix D

Reading Instruction PowerPoint Presentation

Session 1



## Primary Cont.

- Reading pods lasted 55 minutes
- Materials used
  - Basal
  - A to Z
  - Trade Books
  - Big Books

## A Look At The Past Continued

- Intermediate Grades
  - Whole group instruction
  - Associates helped struggling readers
  - Homeroom teacher did all of the instruction
- Materials used
  - Trade books
  - A to Z

## MacMillan McGraw-Hill

- **Incorporates**

- Spelling
- Vocabulary
- Guided Reading
- Whole Group
- ESL

## Incorporates Cont.

- Phonics and Phonemic Awareness
- Centers
- Grammar
- Fluency
- Comprehension

## Macmillan McGraw-Hill Cont.

- Whole Group Instruction

- Vocabulary Lesson
- Big Books
- Phonemic Awareness Lesson
- Phonics Lesson

- Whole Group Instruction

- Get Ready Story
- Main Selection Story
- Comprehension Activity
- Oral questions
- Retelling cards

## Macmillan McGraw-Hill Cont.

- 4 Levels of Guided Reading
  - Approaching
  - On level
  - Beyond level
  - ESL

## Macmillan McGraw-Hill Cont.

- Approaching Lesson
  - Phonemic Awareness
  - Phonics
  - Decodable Reader
  - Approaching leveled reader
  - Comprehension Activities

## Macmillan McGraw-Hill Cont.

### •On Level Lesson

- Phonics
- Decodable Reader
- On level book
- Main selection from basal
- Comprehension Activities
- Fluency

## Macmillan McGraw-Hill Cont.

### •Beyond Level Lesson

- Beyond level book
- Main selection from basal
- Comprehension Activities
- Fluency

## Macmillan McGraw-Hill Cont.

- ESL Lesson
  - Oral Language
  - Leveled reader
  - Comprehension Activities



## Appendix E

## Article Summary Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

## Article Summary Sheet

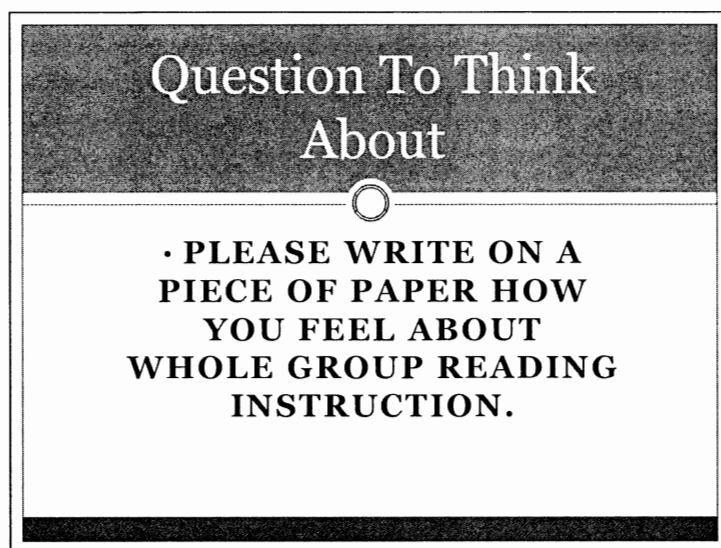
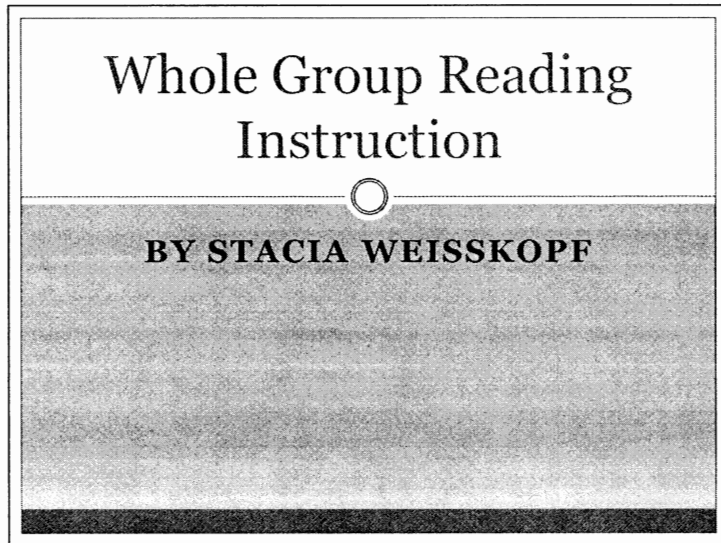
Article: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Write about two things that you learned.
2. Could you apply this type of reading instruction in your classroom? If yes, then how? If no, then why?
3. List at least one question or concern you have about this type of reading instruction.

Appendix F

Whole Group Reading Instruction PowerPoint Presentation

Session 2



## 1st Reason For Using Whole Group Instruction

### **1) TEACHERS SPEND TIME ONLY CREATING ONE SET OF MATERIALS.**

- Schools have materials available

### **FIRST REASON CONT.**

- Very easy to plan for
- Is this your reason for using whole group?

## 2nd Reason For Using Whole Group Instruction

**2) TEACHERS  
EMPHASIZE A SINGLE  
SET OF OBJECTIVES  
FOR ALL STUDENTS.**

### **2<sup>ND</sup> REASON CONT.**

- All students are being exposed to the same skills
- Good way to introduce new skills
- Do you feel this is effective in your classroom?

## 3rd Reason For Using Whole Group Instruction

**3) TEACHERS USE THEIR  
EXPERTISE TO EXPLAIN  
NEW MATERIAL TO ALL  
STUDENTS.**

### **3<sup>RD</sup> REASON CONT.**

- Usually followed by seatwork
- Students explore what they have learned

## 4th Reason For Using Whole Group Instruction

**4) STUDENTS MAY BE  
MOTIVATED TO LEARN BY  
INCENTIVES WHICH  
CAUSES THEM TO  
COMPETE WITH ONE  
ANOTHER.**

### 4<sup>th</sup> Reason Cont.

- Students learn from one another
- Students inspire each other to learn more

## 5th Reason For Using Whole Group Instruction

**5) ALL STUDENTS ARE  
EXPOSED TO THE SAME  
MATERIAL AND  
OPPORTUNITIES.**

### 5<sup>th</sup> Reason Cont.

- Grade level material for all students
- Prepares them for the realities of the real world

**LOU, ABRAMI, AND SPENCE 2000**

## Study on 29 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teachers

### BASIC INFORMATION

- ❖ Urban school district in southeastern U.S.
- ❖ LD students involved
- ❖ Data collected for one school year
- ❖ Study 1: interviews and observations
- ❖ Study 2: impact of reading practices

## Results of Study

- **21 OF 29 TEACHERS USE WHOLE GROUP INSTRUCTION**
- **AVERAGE AND HIGH-ACHIEVING STUDENTS MADE MODERATE PROGRESS WITH DECODING AND COMPREHENSION**



## Results Cont.

➤ **STUDENTS WITH LEARNING  
DISABILITIES MADE MINIMAL  
GAINS**

## Results Cont.

➤ **TEACHERS NEED TRAINING  
FOR HOW TO GROUP STUDENTS**

**SCHUMM, MOODY, AND VAUGHN (2000)**

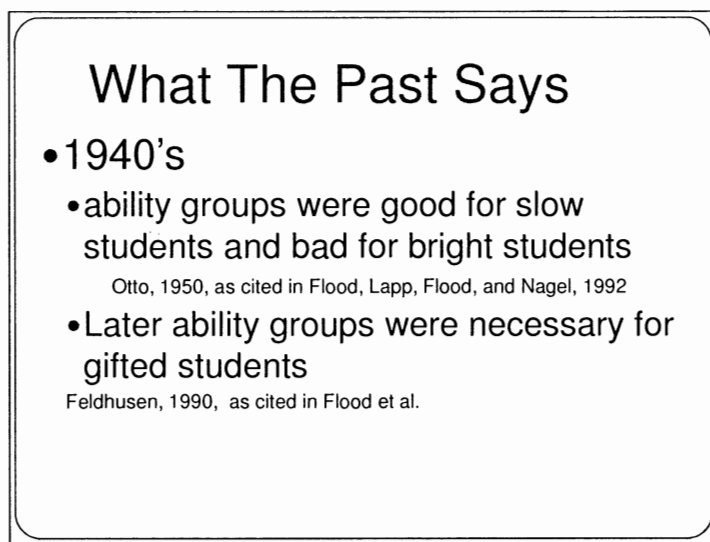
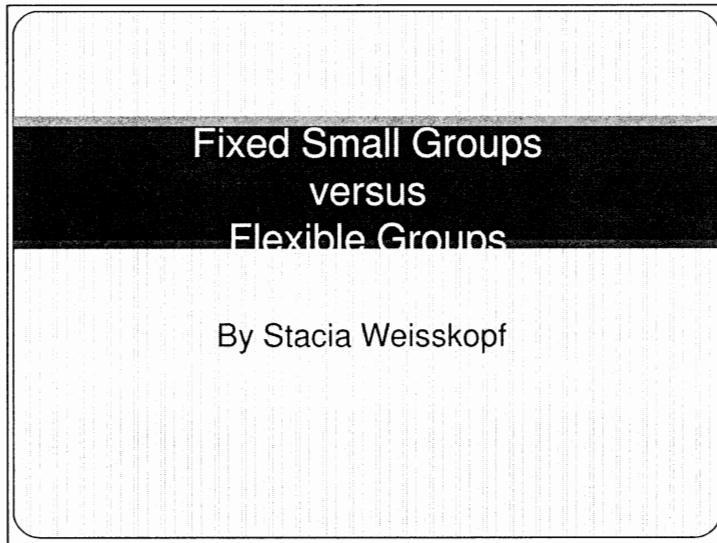
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## Appendix G

### Fixed Small Groups Versus Flexible Groups PowerPoint Presentation

#### Session 3



## Past Cont.

- 1980's
  - Ability groups were primary grouping pattern

Flood et al.

## Ability Groups

- Labels and sorts students
- Low groups read less because focus is on skill work
- Low groups read more out loud
- Low groups do not use higher order thinking skills

## Ability Groups Cont.

- Teacher expectation for behavior is lower in low groups
- Teacher controls talking in low groups

Flood et al.

## Why use flexible groups?

- Enhances teaching and learning
- Each student's needs are met and there is an understanding
- There is no right or wrong way to group students
- Groups are not permanent

## Flexible Groups

- Successful if:

- a) You choose most appropriate basis for grouping
  - o Interest, random, or skills development
- b) If you choose the most effective format
  - o Small group or individual

## Successful Cont.

- c) If you choose the most appropriate materials
  - o Different topics or same material for all groups

Flood et al.

## How To Design Flexible Groups

- 1) Decide why each group is established.
- 2) Decide how many students are in each group.
- 3) Decide what materials would best fit the needs of each group.

## Teacher's Role in Flexible Groups

1. Encourage interactions among students.
2. Encourage interactions with the teacher.
3. Provide scaffolding.

## Does heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping matter?

- Effects of grouping are different for each ability level

## What's Best For Each Level

- Low-ability students learn best in heterogeneous groups.
- Average-ability students learn best in homogeneous groups.
- High-ability students learn just as much in either group.

Lou et al., 1996, as cited in Saleh, Lazonder, and DeJong, 2005



## What district assessments can we use to form flexible groups?

- Basic Reading Inventory
  - Comprehension, fluency, and sight words
- Phonemic Awareness Test
  - Phonemic awareness and phonics skills
- Iowa Test of Basic Skills
  - Skills for each content area

## Assessments Cont.

- Running Records
- Fry Words
- Basal Assessments
  - Skills taught for that week

## What about ESL students?

- Teachers need to work with the ESL teacher.
- Use books that interest them at a variety of levels.
- Books about their culture will help with comprehension.

## ESL Cont.

- Small group homogeneous instruction is best.
- Have high expectations
- Fun atmosphere will cause students to take chances

Ganske, Monroe, and Strickland, 2003

## What about low SES?

- If students are failing then look at your teaching methods.
  - Do they need more of the same instruction or do they need flexible groups?

## Low SES Cont.

- Success can happen if:
  - You use well designed instruction
  - You also use smaller groups
  - You use pull-out when necessary

O'Conner, Fulmer, Harty, and Bell, 2005

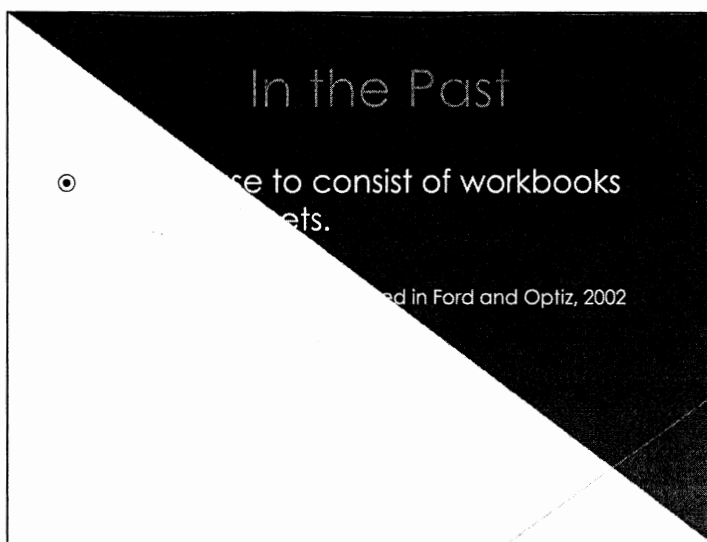
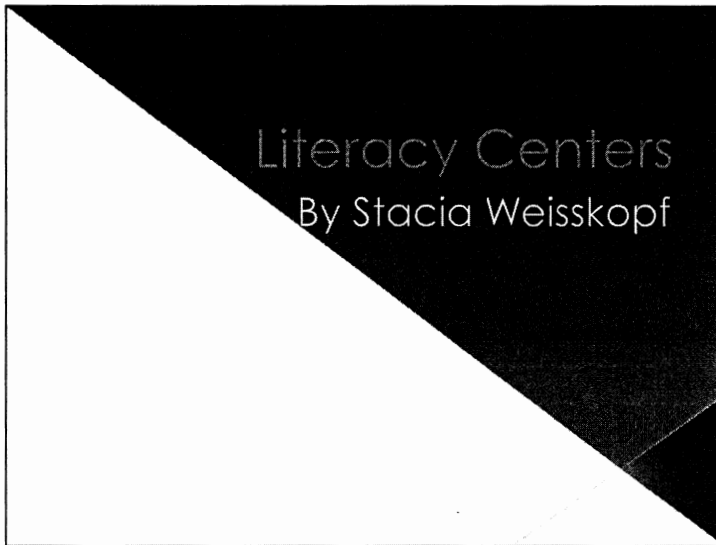
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## Appendix H

### Literacy Centers PowerPoint Presentation

#### Session 3

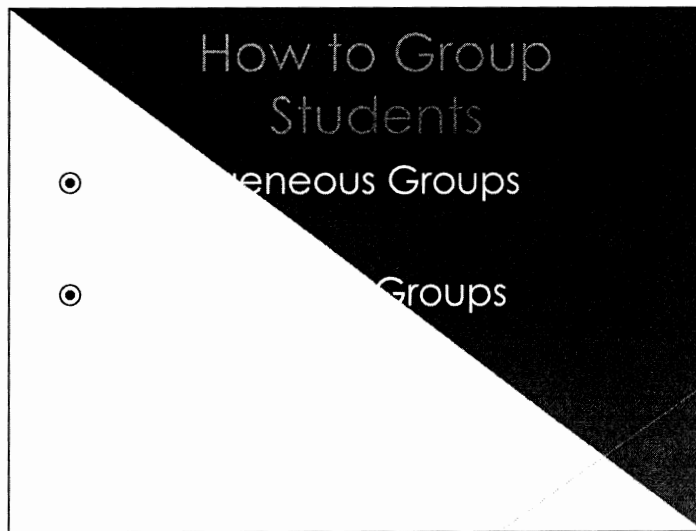


## Implementing Centers

- choose own center
- every center
- until task is to

## Implementing Centers Cont.

- stay at one center and have
- in that center



Considerations Cont.

2) Consider your activities

- > Working with students in flexible
- Encourage more reading
- Respond to students' responses to
- Consider how they carry on

Considerations Cont.

Consider state or district

- Encourage students to



## Considerations Cont.

4) Without engagement in social settings.

- How they will
- as at

## Considerations Cont.

an infrastructure of away from the

- work independently
- transition time
- erns
- among
-

## Consideration # 5 Cont.

- Efficient use of teacher time
- Consistent routines

## Centers That Meet Established Criteria

1. **Post**
  - Before, review after , or
2. **differing**
  -

Centers Cont.

Reading/Writing the Room

- Word boards and pointers
- Family words or words
- 
-

Centers Cont.

Games/Story Packs

- Used in guided group
- 
- 
-

## Centers Cont.

- variety of tools, formats, and materials
- students, teachers, or volunteers, or
- 

## Tip

- are successful if the learning materials are accessible and

## How To Train Students

- Use only one center at a time
  - > Rotate centers to three days per week
- Introduce new materials as introduced, one at a time
  - > Introduce new materials one at a time

## Training Cont.

- Use the two to three months
  - > Use the two to three months of your class

## References

Dotiz, M. (2002). Using centers to  
taken during guided reading  
learning experiences  
her. *The Reading*  
Retrieved  
cation Full Text

Appendix I

Other Ways to Group PowerPoint Presentation

Session 4

## Other Ways to Group

By Stacia Weisskopf

## Possible Basis For Groupings

- Skills Development
  - Reteaching of certain skills
- Interest
  - Students placed together or in different groups to be motivators

## Possible Bases Cont.

### ▸ Work Habits

- This causes heterogeneous groups because quality of student's work

### ▸ Prior Knowledge (content)

- Students may be put together or spread out to act as experts

## Possible Bases Cont.

### ▸ Prior Knowledge (strategies)

- Students put in certain groups to model for others

### ▸ Task/Activity

- Put students at a project they will succeed in



## Possible Basis Cont.

- Social
  - Carefully place talkers, leaders, followers
- Random
  - Can be useful
- Students' Choice
  - Could be best base

## Possible Formats

- Individual
- Dyads (pairs)
- Small Group (3–4)
- Larger Group (7–10)
- Half-Class
- Whole Group

## Possible Formats

- Teacher-led
- Student-led
- Cooperative
  - Leadership shared between teacher and students

## Possible Materials

- Same materials for all groups
  - Happens often especially with core literature selections
- Different levels of material with similar theme
  - Students learn same concept or theme but with appropriate leveled book

## Possible Materials Cont.

- Different themes within a topic
  - May happen when learning about characters
- Different topics
  - Happens when thinking of student's interests

## References

- Flood, J., Lapp, D., Flood, S., & Nagel, G. (1992). Am I allowed to group? Using flexible patterns for effective instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 45(8), 608-616. Retrieved February 11, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

Appendix J

Effective Reading Lesson Plan

Other Ways to Group for Instruction

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

Effective Reading Lesson Plan

Group Members _____		
<b>Bases for Grouping</b>	<b>Formats</b>	<b>Materials</b>
Skills development	Individual	Same materials for all groups
Interest	Dyads	
Work Habits	Small Groups (3-4)	Different levels of material with similar theme
Prior Knowledge (content)	Larger Groups (7-10)	
Prior Knowledge (strategies)	Half-class	
Task/activity	Whole Group	Different themes within a topic
Social	Teacher-led	
Random	Student-led	
Students' choice	Cooperative	

Group Members _____		
<b>Bases for Grouping</b>	<b>Formats</b>	<b>Materials</b>
Skills development	Individual	Same materials for all groups
Interest	Dyads	
Work Habits	Small Groups (3-4)	Different levels of material with similar theme
Prior Knowledge (content)	Larger Groups (7-10)	
Prior Knowledge (strategies)	Half-class	
Task/activity	Whole Group	Different themes within a topic
Social	Teacher-led	
Random	Student-led	
Students' choice	Cooperative	

## Appendix K

### Survey

SD= Strongly Disagree    D= Disagree    N= Neutral    A= Agree    SA= Strongly Agree

1. I found this inservice very helpful.  
SD....D....N....A....SA
2. I understand the difference between flexible and fixed small groups.  
SD....D....N....A....SA
3. I understand the balance needed between whole group and flexible groups.  
SD....D....N....A....SA
4. I can successfully implement centers.  
SD....D....N....A....SA
5. My students are engaged during center time.  
SD....D....N....A....SA
6. I would like to learn more about flexible grouping.  
SD....D....N....A....SA
7. I feel my students are benefiting from flexible groups.  
SD....D....N....A....SA
8. I will implement whole group reading, flexible groups, and centers.  
SD....D....N....A....SA

Please write any additional comments.