

# Thinking & Learning

Conference



**CAROLYN COIL**

Saturday 23 May

**Flexible Grouping: It's More Than  
Just Moving Their Seats!**

*Session 2*

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# CAROLYN COIL

Carolyn (EdD) is an internationally known speaker and consultant who has worked in the field of education and training for over 30 years. She currently teaches courses in gifted education and does workshops for schools on a wide variety of topics. Carolyn has been adjunct professor at several universities and worked all over the world in places like Bermuda, Ecuador and China.



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## Flexible Grouping: It's More Than Just Moving Their Seats!

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### Why Use Flexible Groups?

- ✓ Teaching students to work in a variety of group settings as well as teaching them how to work individually is one of the most effective ways to develop independence and responsibility.
- ✓ Research is increasingly done in teams across nearly all fields. Teams typically produce more frequently cited research than individuals do, and this advantage has been increasing over time.... These results are detailed for sciences and engineering, social sciences, arts and humanities suggesting that the process of knowledge creation has fundamentally changed. (Wuchty, Jones & Uzzi, 2007)
- ✓ It helps students practice the essential 4 Cs:
  - Collaboration
  - Communication
  - Creativity
  - Critical Thinking
- ✓ Multiple research studies report that students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other formats. (Barbara Gross Davis, 2009)
- ✓ The number one skill needed by 21<sup>st</sup> century employers is the ability to work in teams and groups. This is true for nearly every line of work such as:
  - Working at a fast-food restaurant
  - Being in the military
  - Health care
  - Teaching
  - Manufacturing
  - Government and law
  - Ph. D. research
- ✓ Knowing how to work in teams and groups is the focus of one of the general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum
  - Personal and social capability



### Ask yourself:

*What are the learning outcomes  
and  
how can I best group my students in order to accomplish them?*

**FLEXIBLE GROUPING PATTERNS FOR THE DIFFERENTIATED CLASSROOM**

*These groups should be thought of as flexible, not permanent*

**Homogeneous/Ability/Cluster Grouping**

- Clusters students of similar ability, readiness, learning style or interest.
- Usually based on some type of pre-assessment such as prior school performance, teacher observation, or standardized test scores.
- Use for remediation, acceleration, and enrichment.
- Can be used in multi-grade classes.
- Even in a theoretically more homogeneous class, there are differing ability levels and sub-grouping may be needed.
- Possible disadvantage: Inflexibility with unchanging groups that don't meet student needs.

**Heterogeneous Grouping**

- Groups students of differing abilities, level or interests.
- Use to help students understand different points of view.
- Works best when reading level or math proficiency is not involved.
- Good for group projects promoting creativity.
- Teaches skills in delegation, leadership and sharing.
- Possible disadvantage: One or two students do all the work yet everyone in the group gets the same mark.

**Individualized Instruction/Independent Study**

- Facilitates the management of many achievement levels.
- Self-paced learning at each student's performance level.
- Good in exploring individual interest areas.
- Teaches independent learning, organisational skills, time management and the development of individual responsibility.
- Must be monitored and appropriately evaluated.
- Possible disadvantage: Too much time without interaction and learning from others.

**Whole Class Instruction**

- Efficient and effective when presenting new content to all.
- Use for initial instruction, AV presentations and some enrichment activities.
- Needed when doing a highly motivational activity that should include all students.
- Use for guest speakers, classroom celebrations and your favorite lecture topics.
- Possible disadvantage: Overuse!!

**Pairs/Partners**

- Can be based on ability, skill or interest
- Works well with both homogeneous and heterogeneous pairs.
- Assures that a student isn't going to get "lost" or not participate in the group setting.
- More focused learning than in a larger grouping.
- Accommodates students who are shy or learning English
- Possible disadvantages: Mismatched peer tutors; left out or unwanted students

## Guidelines for Managing Flexible Groups

1. Before grouping students for any activity, ask yourself: “*What is the learning outcome of this activity and what is the best type of grouping to meet this learning outcome?*” Then group your students accordingly.
2. Use various types of assessment data to help you in forming groups.
3. Use some kind of record-keeper so you and your students will know at a glance who is in each group for a particular activity.
4. Give explicit instructions about the task each group is going to do before the groups begin to work.
5. Teach students how to listen to one another as they work in a group.
6. Classroom rules and procedures for group work should be written, posted, and understood by all.
7. Model and practice procedures and routines for getting into groups so that movement becomes easy and automatic.
8. Facilitate procedures and routines that involve distributing, collecting and storing materials, moving chairs and/or desks for group work, getting help from the teacher, and monitoring/dealing with the noise level in the classroom.
9. Don't give students too long at any given time to work in a group. The length of time partly depends on the ages of your students and grade level of your class. It also depends on the maturity and attention spans of your students. Use your own good judgment about this as you would with any classroom activity.
10. Have a specific procedure for stopping group work and returning to a whole class setting. The more your students practice and do this, the less confusion and disruption there will be.
11. Each student should keep an individual learning log during group work.
12. Have groups evaluate their own group process skills.
13. In some group situations, each student may have a specific role. In other cases, only a group leader needs to be designated. A *Group Leadership Checklist* can be used to focus the leader on his or her role.

## FLEXIBLE GROUPING: TEACHER PLANNING FORM

### When should you use which type of flexible grouping?

The answer to this question depends on:

- The structure of your school
- Your students' personal characteristics
- Ability levels of the students in your class
- Learning styles and modalities
- Student interests
- The learning outcome for each activity

**Unit of work** \_\_\_\_\_

List unit activities that will be done in each of these groups:

1. Homogeneous / Cluster / Ability Grouping

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2. Heterogeneous / Mixed Ability Grouping

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3. Individualised Work / Independent Study

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4. Whole Class Instruction

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5. Pairs or Partners

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## STUDENT INDIVIDUAL LEARNING LOG FOR GROUP WORK

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Group tasks and accomplishments today:**

**What I did:**

**What the group did well together:**

**Ways to improve:**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Group tasks and accomplishments today:**

**What I did:**

**What the group did well together:**

**Ways to improve:**

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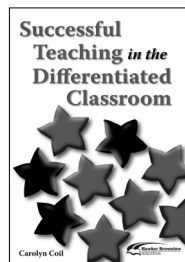




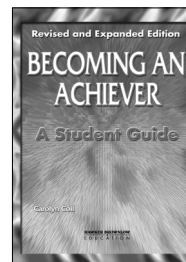


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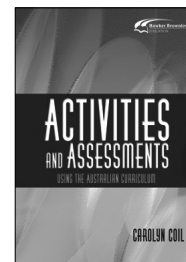
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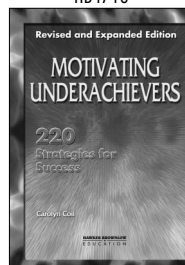
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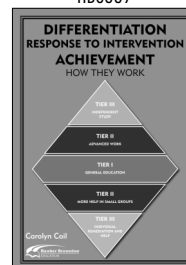
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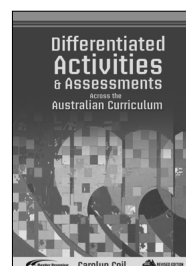
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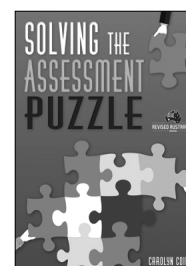
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POL3868



POL3875

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