

ABILITY GROUPING FOR HIGH POTENTIAL AND GIFTED STUDENTS

High Potential and Gifted Education Policy References

1.4.2 and 1.6.2

Other Policy References

Key Terms

- **Ability grouping** refers to the strategy of grouping students of similar ability or achievement levels on the basis of observed behaviour or performance for purposes of teaching and learning.¹
- **Cluster Grouping** is a means of grouping high potential and gifted students in the regular heterogeneous classroom, considering special needs, abilities or interests thereby allowing the teacher to differentiate the curriculum for a group rather than just one or two students.
- **Heterogeneous grouping** refers to organising students into groups based on mixed ability.
- **Homogeneous grouping** involves grouping students on the basis of similarities in need, ability, or interest.
- **Pull-out programs** take a student out of regular classes during the day for special programming.
- **Dynamic grouping** is where students are grouped and re-grouped according to the outcomes of various assessment practices.
- **Formative assessment** informs the teacher while the instruction is occurring through a variety of methods and evaluations to identify student progress.
- **Diagnostic assessment** is a form of pre-assessment to determine a student's individual strengths and weaknesses.
- **Flexible grouping** requires the fluid movement of students between groups depending on the task and/or purpose (see dynamic grouping).
- **Enrichment** enhances and broadens the curriculum, thereby improving learning outcomes for students. **Enriching the curriculum is beneficial to all students.** It can include, but is not limited to, extracurricular activities, programs, projects or initiatives. Enrichment increases the challenge of learning within the same-year context, and is linked to the curriculum.
- **Extension** deepens students' knowledge, understanding and skills, and is provided through opportunities that would typically be offered to older-age peers. **While enrichment benefits all students, extension is primarily for high potential and gifted students.**

- **Extracurricular** programs and provisions extend a student in an area of interest that is outside the curriculum. Extracurricular programs are associated with the school but are outside the core curriculum.
- **Full-time ability grouping** are formal extension classes that also include OC classes and partially or fully selective high schools
- **Between class grouping** is where students are grouped into fixed classes, courses or curricular tracks based on prior academic achievement.
- **Within class grouping** is the practice of organising students of similar ability into small groups for instruction in a classroom setting.

What does the research say?

- Evidence of the impact of ability grouping on academic performance is mixed ² due to differences in the definitions of ability grouping, variation in the pedagogical practice used in grouped settings, the size and number of studies, and the methodological analyses used to evaluate the data. For these reasons it is important to consider the research evidence in the context of the type of ability grouping and the school setting.
- Students of all ability levels are not negatively impacted by gifted ability grouping, cross grade subject grouping and within class grouping.³
- Gifted students benefit, at least to some extent, from within-class grouping and cross-grade subject grouping, where they are grouped for a specific subject or activity based on students' prior achievement or learning potential.³
- Meta-analyses have reported that gifted students make considerable gains in programs that are specifically designed for them.³
- Where students are grouped into fixed classes based on prior achievement, evidence from meta-analyses reveals that the effects are negligible, particularly if the same curriculum is provided to all groups.³
- Ability grouping is more likely to have a positive effect when effective curriculum differentiation is implemented at the same time.^{3,4}
- Ability grouping is justified when there is a 'true acceleration' program that is advanced and differentiated.^{5,6}
- A well implemented ability-grouped program for gifted students can be of value when considering both learning and social and emotional benefits, having minimal impact on other learners.⁷
- For grouping to be most effective, appropriately challenging and differentiated curriculum options that meet students' specific learning needs should be offered.⁸
- Ability grouping can be effective for high potential and gifted students, although curriculum differentiation is still required for optimal talent development.^{9,10}
- Extension activities may involve a selection process, which identifies students that are most able, interested and likely to succeed in the learning experience (Passow 1982)¹¹
- Teachers need to use flexible grouping strategies in order to implement differentiated curriculum and instruction. Managing the differentiated classroom requires purposeful grouping and the establishment of routines which facilitate orderly and efficient movement between whole, small group and individual learning activities (Tomlinson 2005)¹²

- Recent research supports assertions that the gifted cluster model, which includes effective teacher training, serves as a useful approach to providing gifted education services within a school. Teacher training remains a critical component to the success of the cluster program model and should include differentiated instruction, compacting curriculum, understanding behaviours, characteristics and social and emotional needs of gifted students.¹³
- Participants in a research study perceived homogeneous grouping more positively with respect to academic outcomes. They learned more in the challenging environment provided by homogeneous classes. However, they had mixed feelings about which setting met their social needs. Participants seemed to value having both similar peers in homogeneous classes and the social diversity of heterogeneous classes. A troubling finding that emerged was the preference of a few students for heterogeneous classes because they were easier and enabled them to attain a high class ranking with little work.¹⁴

Where can I learn more?

Revisiting Gifted Education CESE

References:

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- ¹¹ (Passow 1982).
- ¹² Henderson, L & Jarvis, J. (2016) The Gifted Dimension of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers: Implications for Professional Learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*. Vol 41(8), 4
- ¹³ Brulles, D., Saunders, R & Cohn, S.J. (2010) Improving Performance for Gifted Students in a Cluster Grouping Model. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. Vol. 34 (2), pp. 327–350
- ¹⁴ Adams-Byers, J., Squiller Whitsell, S. & Moon, S.M. (2004). Gifted Students' Perceptions of the Academic and Social/Emotional Effects of Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Grouping. *Gifted Child Quarterly*