Friday Celebrity Newsletter

February 15,2013

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"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." ~ Charles Darwin

THIS WEEK'S BEST PRACTICES . . . . . .

- **Teachers using gallery walks to review information.**
- **Students teaching other students.**
- **Students identifying more than one way to solve problems in math.**
- **Students working in groups to analyze the meanings of poems.**
- **Teachers participating in PLC's on Accelerated Reader.**
- **Students explaining what they are doing and why they are doing it.**
- **Teachers creating presentations on data.**

Let's Shout it Out!!!!!!

Special thanks to Mrs. Sams-Kenton, CONNECT teachers, and Instructional partners for Cozy Reading Day.

Students at AES for reading 7,799 books. 201 more books and Ms. Scott & Mr. Warren will be clowns for the day.

Teachers for encouraging your students to read.

Mr. Eley, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Mason for keeping our school looking and smelling good.

Special thanks to all students, teachers, faculty, and staff for their dedication in ensuring that we had a great CAN visit.

Resource Corner

This Week's Topic: Flex Grouping

This week's topic is flexible grouping. We keep talking the talk, but are we correctly walking the

walk? Are we grouping our students correctly for flex grouping? Are we using different instructional techniques during our flex grouping blocks? The information below will give us a better insight of what we should be doing during flex grouping.

Flexible Grouping

by Catherine Valentino

What Is Flexible Grouping?

Flexible grouping is not a new concept in American education. It has its roots in the original one-room rural schoolhouse where students of varying ages, backgrounds, and abilities were grouped and regrouped to meet instructional needs. As towns and cities grew and universal education became a national goal, ways of grouping students changed. The assumption that students of the same age learned at about the same rate caused most schools to group students in classes by their ages, a practice that continues today. Whole-class instruction was a natural outgrowth of that decision.

Observing that same-age children learned to read at widely varying rates, teachers began to divide students into subgroups based on perceived ability. Math subgroups soon followed. But change is happening. Today, classrooms are filled with children from an increasing variety of cultural and economic backgrounds. As part of a national push for citizens who can think, solve problems, work with others, and learn on the job, educators are taking a close look at the implications of using whole-group and ability-group instruction exclusively. Teachers are discovering that informally grouping and regrouping students in a variety of ways throughout the school day can make a teacher's job easier and students more productive. This teaching strategy is called flexible grouping.

Teachers who use flexible grouping strategies often employ several organizational patterns for instruction. Students are grouped and regrouped according to specific goals, activities, and individual needs. When making grouping decisions, the dynamics and advantages inherent in each type of group must be considered. Both teacher-led and student-led groups can contribute to learning.

Teacher-Led Groups

Teacher-led groups are the most common configuration used in classrooms today. They include whole-class, small group, and individual instruction. In general, communication paths in teacher-led groups are almost exclusively between teacher and student. Teacher-led groups are an effective and efficient way of introducing material, summing-up the conclusions made by individual groups, meeting the common needs of a large or small group, and providing individual attention or instruction.

- **Whole-Class Instruction** Whole-class instruction is often used to introduce new materials and strategies to the entire class. Working with the whole class to introduce new concepts can build common experiences and provide a shared basis for further exploration, problem solving, and skill development. Whole-class instruction also can help identify students' prior knowledge and experiences that will affect new knowledge acquisition.
- **Small-Group Instruction** Small-group instruction is familiar to most teachers; it is an often-used strategy. Small groups can provide opportunities for working with students who have common needs, such as reinforcement or enrichment.
- **Students Working Alone in Teacher-Directed Activities** Although learning to work cooperatively constitutes an important educational goal, students must also learn to work independently. Individual responses may prove especially helpful for students in refining their own thoughts. For example, after sharing strategies in small, student-led groups, each student might reflect on the group's problem-solving methods and formulate a personal problem-solving strategy.

Student-Led Groups

Student-led groups can take many forms, but they all share a common feature-students control the group dynamics and maintain a voice in setting the agenda for the group to follow. Student-led groups provide opportunities for divergent thinking and encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. One of the benefits of student-led groups is that they model "real-life" adult situations in which people work together, not in isolation, to solve problems. Students working in groups learn to work with people from varying backgrounds and with different experiences, sharpening social skills and developing a sense of confidence in their own abilities. A variety of group types and a sampling of activities that may be appropriate for each are described below.

- **Collaborative Groups** The essence of collaborative learning is the team spirit that motivates students to contribute to the learning of others on the team. Because team success depends on individual learning, members share ideas and reinterpret instructions to help each other. In this environment, students convey to one another the idea that learning is valuable and fun.

  Students in collaborative-learning groups can make predictions or estimations about a problem, share ideas, or formulate questions. After working independently, group members might cooperate in composing either an oral solution or a written response. These groups prove particularly effective for open-ended problem-solving investigations. Collaborative groups come in all sizes and configurations, depending on the instructional goal to be achieved. Two strategies for using collaborative groups are described below.

  Circle Sharing In circle sharing, children sit in a large circle so that each student can see the rest. The leader (either the teacher or a selected student) presents an open-ended statement or problem, and each student in turn responds with his or her own conclusion. One student records each group member's response in order. Students may "pass" as their turn comes up, but they should have an answer ready when the circle is completed. As an alternative, students can pass a sheet of paper from one to the next. When the signal is given, the first group member writes down his or her idea for approaching the investigation. The paper then passes to the person on the left. This strategy is excellent for brainstorming divergent approaches to a problem.

  Four Corners Pose a question or problem with four parts, operations, or solving strategies. Have students select which of the four is their choice to work with. Have each child go to the corner of the classroom where that problem part is displayed. This is a quick way to get children who have similar interests together to do further problem solving.

- **Performance-Based Groups** Sometimes groups of students with similar needs might benefit from additional support in the completion of a task. Unlike traditional ability groups, performance-based groups form for a short time and respond to the dynamic nature of learning. Performance-based groups are most effective when formed on the basis of a particular need rather than in response to predetermined performance levels. Performance-based groups provide a means for increasing students' access to a particular concept or skill. Suitable strategies for these groups include introducing language, using concrete

models, playing a concept game for skill practice, or practicing strategies. Strategies for use with performance-based groups are listed below.

Group Study Group study most often occurs after a session of whole-group instruction. After the main concept is discussed as a class, students get into small groups of two to four to complete a cooperative assignment that reinforces, expands on, or tests their knowledge. Groups can brainstorm ideas or complete various explorations or investigations.

Interview for Options After working individually on an investigation, group members take turns interviewing each other to determine how each person approached the problem. After they have all had a chance to share their thinking, the group can summarize what they learned from the interviews. Use of graphic organizers or posters can be helpful

- **Student Dyads, or Pairs** Grouping students in pairs often forms the basis for peer and cross-age programs. Various strategies for use with student pairs include the following.

Partner Turns Students are paired before a whole-class presentation is made. As you make your presentation, give pairs a chance to share ideas, information, and plans or strategies for problem solving. This strategy provides a good way to quickly reinforce active listening and individual approaches to problem solving.

Think, Pair, Share After whole-class instruction, have individuals think about what strategies they would use for approaching the investigation. Students should write down their ideas. After a time, have pairs meet to share their ideas and strategies. This approach helps encourage divergent thinking and provides students with immediate feedback on their approaches to problem solving. As with any change, implementing flexible grouping requires a period of adjustment. But the results will be worth the effort!

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Catherine Valentino, Author-in-Residence for Houghton Mifflin Company, is a **DiscoveryWorks** author.

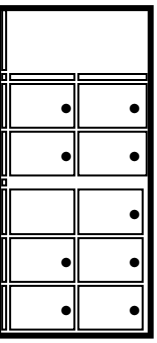
Flex Grouping Resources

www.learningpt.org/pdfs/literacy/**flexibleGrouping**.pdf

www.eduplace.com/science/profdev/articles/valentino.html

www.mathwire.com/strategies/is.html

http://www.readingrockets.org/article/30676/



Just for Thought: Ahoskie Elementary School~ We are changing the way we do business.

One might ask, "What is change?" Change is when you make something different. At AES, we have changed a lot this year. We have changed our curriculum. Some changed jobs or grade levels. We have changed the way we teach our children. We have changed the way in which we plan our instruction. We have changed our actions. Now, we are being looked at differently. We are changing, we are better than we were, but we are not as good as we can be. We are working things out. Ahoskie Elementary is changing the way we do business. Jennifer Hudson sums AES up the best:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-D6Q_nzJ_g

We are leaving our past behind, we are changing our school, and nothing is going to stop us NOW!!!!!!

From Ms. Scott

I would like to thank all of you for your dedication and support at AES!!! As we walk around AES, let's all remember to Be Responsible, Expect the Best, Always be Prepared, Respect Others, and Stay Safe!!! Let's make 2012-2013, a year in which AES shines all over Hertford County and North Carolina!!!!

Have a wonderful weekend!!!!

Ms. Kimberly Scott, Assistant Principal

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