

Exercise 8.1

Some Guidelines for Teachers for Effective Group Work

Consider the following guidelines as you plan for group work in your differentiated classroom. If you are a teacher, consider the degree to which these statements typify your work with student groups. If you are an administrator, think about the degree to which teachers consistently apply these principles in their work with student groups. In both cases, note specific items that are worthy of further thought, discussion, or formal professional development. Use the questions in faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, or department meetings to talk about ways in which teachers can support effective group work in their classrooms.

1. All students in the group should understand the task goals and directions.
2. All students in the group should understand what is expected of individuals to make the group work well.
3. The task students are asked to do in the group must be aligned with the task goals (must lead students to what they should know, understand, and be able to do).
4. The students should find the task interesting.
5. The task should require an important contribution from each individual and should be structured in such a way that all students can access important ideas and materials and all students have an appropriate way to express their learning. (The task should not be structured so that some students can contribute to the success of the effort but others cannot.)
6. The task should be appropriately challenging for the group.
7. The task should require genuine collaboration to achieve shared understanding. (It should not be possible for some students to do the work and others to remain disengaged.)
8. The timelines for the group's work should be brisk (but not rigid).
9. There should be opportunities for teacher or peer coaching and in-process quality checks to support the success of the group and the individuals in it.
10. Each individual in the group should be accountable for his or her own understanding of all elements in the task.
11. Students should understand what to do to support one another's success.
12. Students should understand what to do when the group is not working effectively.

13. Students should understand what to do when they complete their work at a high level of quality.
14. There should be a “way out” for students who are not succeeding with the group. That is, there should be a procedure for having a student exit a group when he or she is persistently disruptive to the group or the group is consistently problematic for the student. The exit strategy should not be punitive but should allow the student to continue working productively in another context. The teacher should arrange to work with the student over time to resolve the issues that have caused the difficulty so that the student will be better able to work collaboratively and productively with peers.