Small-Group Instruction
Tools for First- and Second-Grade Teachers

region4
Educated Solutions

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"An organized and well–designed classroom enables the teacher to observe, support, and meet the learning needs of each child"
(FOUNTAS & PINNELL, 1996, P. 43).

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This checklist (FIGURE 2.3) is designed to help you evaluate your classroom's physical environment—how the space and materials are organized. Enter a minus, check, or plus mark for each item as it pertains to your classroom.

Not at all descriptive of my classroom —	Somewhat descriptive of my classroom ✓	Very descriptive of my classroom +
	There are well-defined areas for large, small, and independent work.	
	The classroom library is inviting and well organized. Books are displayed attractively, and there are several comfortable spaces where students can read.	
	Books are easy to find and return.	
	Books are integrated into the work centers.	
	There are numerous displays of written language at eye level.	
	Management tools, such as a work board, helper's chart, and class rules, are located within easy view.	
	Pocket charts are used in several locations.	
	Materials are organized for easy access and return.	
	Materials are clearly labeled. Simple written directions are provided as needed.	
	Furniture and dividers are arranged so that the teacher has a full view of the classroom.	
	There are comfortable and well-supplied areas for independent reading and writing.	
	Noisy and quiet areas are separated.	
	There are neat, usable places to store, remove, and replace student work.	
	There are poems, charts, big books, and other print materials readily available for students to read.	

Adapted from Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2001). *Guiding readers and writers grades 3-6: Teaching comprehension, genre, and content literacy.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

FIGURE 2.3

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"In a differentiated classroom, the teacher uses many different group configurations over time, and students experience many different working groups and arrangements"
(TOMLINSON, 2001, P. 3).

◇

Display the work board prominently so students can find their names and follow the routine listed for their group (FIGURE 2.5).

Each student goes to the first center on the list and selects a task from that center. Students are encouraged to help the others in their group, talk quietly, and work cooperatively.

When the first task is completed, the student looks at the work board to determine which activity is next. In this way, students are able to work independently until they are called for small-group instruction with the teacher or until work time is over.

You can find an in-depth discussion of rotation systems and self-selected centers in Section III, Literacy Centers for Reading and Writing.
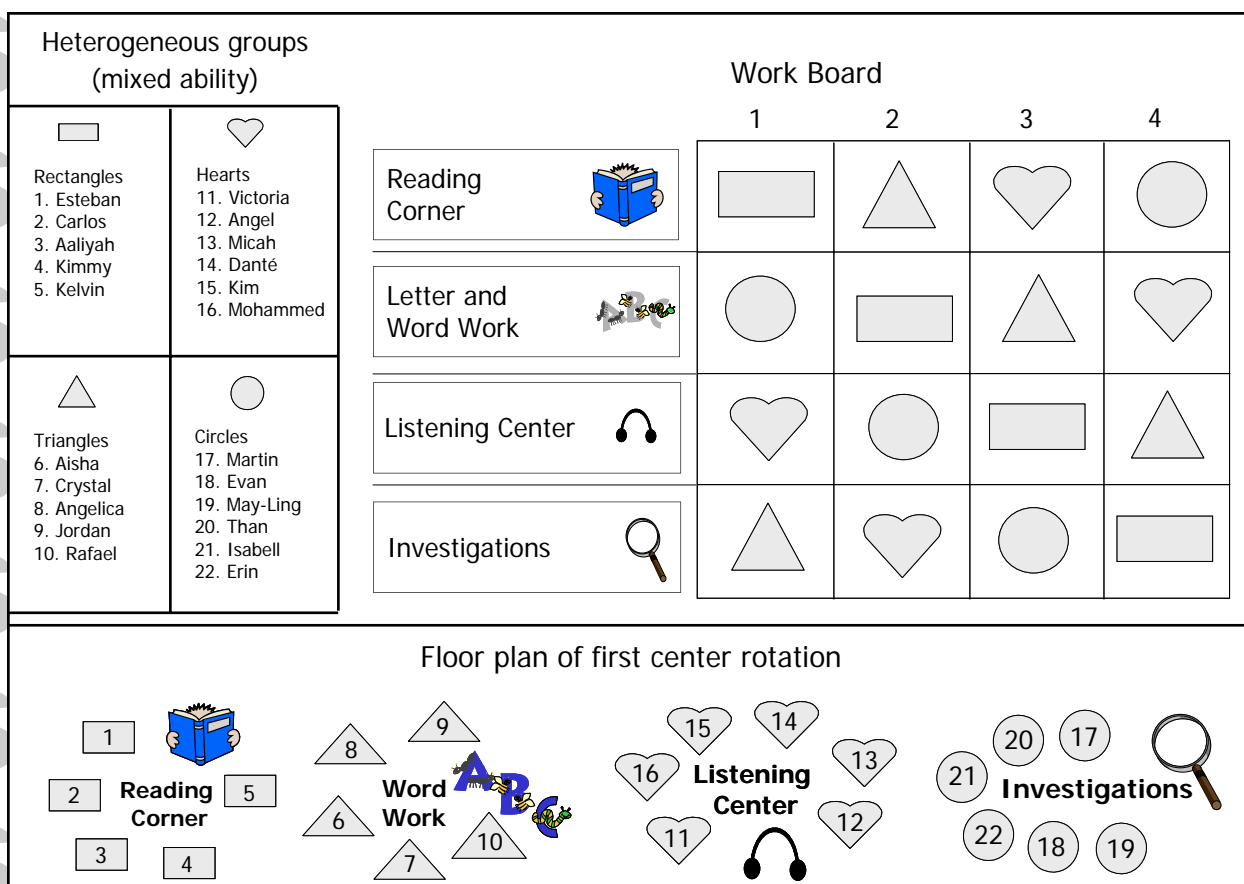

FIGURE 2.5

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*"Flexible grouping is a partial answer to the question
of what to put in the place of whole-class or ability groups"*
(REUTZEL, 1999, P. 276).

◇

While the other students are working in their mixed-ability groups, you work with students who have similar needs in small instructional reading groups (FIGURE 2.6).

Call together a group of students who need to work on fluency: Esteban, Aisha, Victoria, Martin, Angelica, and Kim. After you remind them of a fluency strategy introduced in an earlier mini-lesson (how to chunk words together to read phrases), the students begin reading a familiar text, working on reading smoothly and with expression. You move around the group, listening to individual students read and offering support as needed.

After the students read out loud, have them work on a word-building activity using words from the text they just read. Provide explicit instruction followed by guided practice so you can give immediate feedback as needed. The students continue to work on this activity when they go to the Word Work center, where they will use these words in sentences.
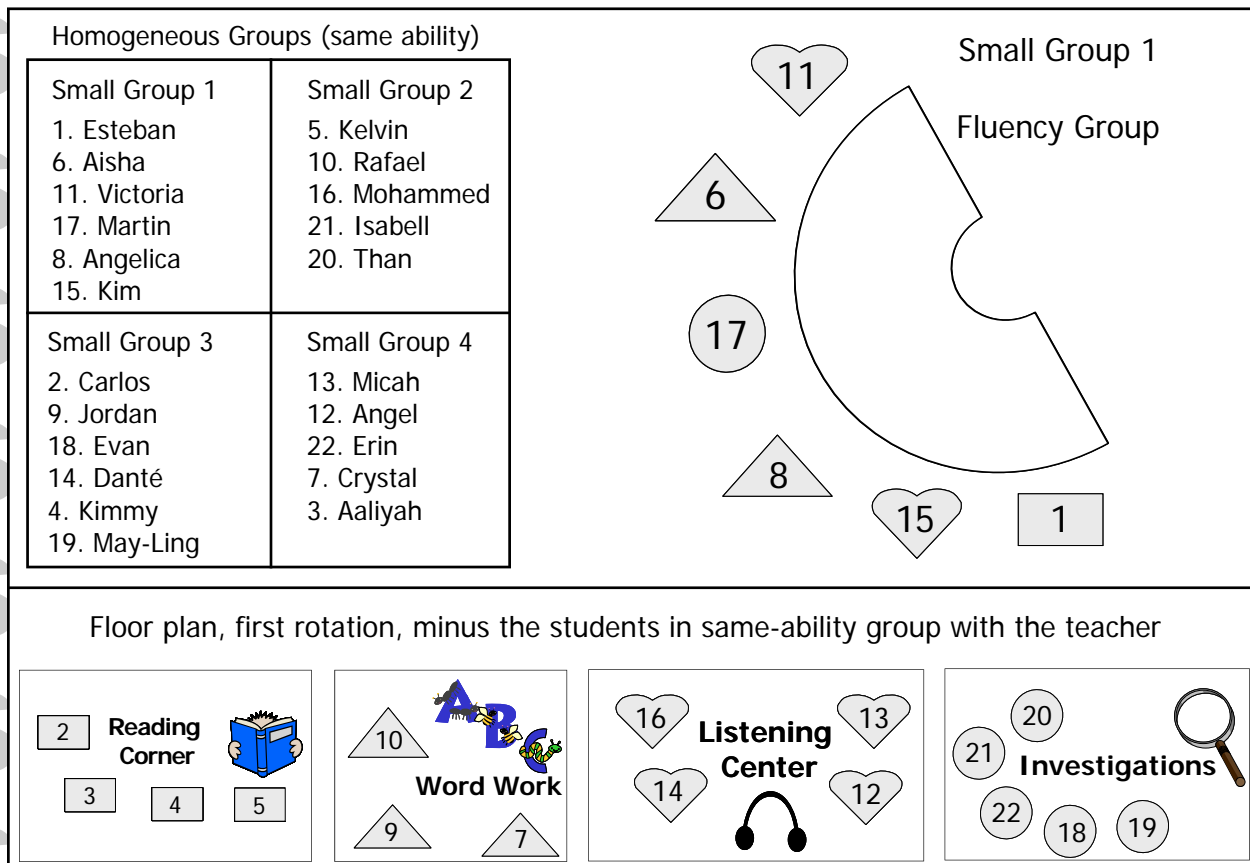
Homogeneous Groups (same ability)

Small Group 1	Small Group 2
1. Esteban	5. Kelvin
6. Aisha	10. Rafael
11. Victoria	16. Mohammed
17. Martin	21. Isabell
8. Angelica	20. Than
15. Kim	

Small Group 3	Small Group 4
2. Carlos	13. Micah
9. Jordan	12. Angel
18. Evan	22. Erin
14. Danté	7. Crystal
4. Kimmy	3. Aaliyah
19. May-Ling	

Small Group 1

Fluency Group

11   6   17   8   15   1

Floor plan, first rotation, minus the students in same-ability group with the teacher

2 **Reading Corner** 3 4 5

10 **A B C** **Word Work** 9 7

16 **Listening Center** 13 14 12

20 21 **Investigations** 22 18 19

FIGURE 2.6

"Many teachers start centers without a clear management system. Don't."

(NATIONS & ALONSO, 2001, P. 13).

In FIGURE 3.3, you see an example of a different type of rotation system. In this example, the students progress through the centers in an assigned order and at an assigned rate. This prevents overcrowding in any particular center and it guarantees that students will participate in every center on the work board.

For example, students in the Rectangle Group begin in the Reading Corner. When the teacher gives the signal, the group moves to the Word Work Center to work with letters and words. Upon the teacher's signal, the group goes to the Listening Center to work on fluency through repeated reading of instructional level text. Finally, the group moves to the Investigations Center, where they read and write about science and social studies topics.

FIGURE 3.3

FIGURE 3.4 shows another variation of the work board, but instead of rotating as a group, the students move from center to center as they complete their work. The groups start together but not necessarily stay together because different students will finish at different rates.

The free choice icon signals an opportunity for students to self-select a center. Having a free choice helps students develop decision-making skills and responsibility for their choices. In this example, students' free choices are the Writing Center, the Overhead Projector Center, and the Technology Center.

FIGURE 3.4

"Simply showing something once isn't enough for most learners, even adult learners"
(DILLER, 2003, P. 6).

Complete the following form (FIGURE 3.15) to evaluate your instructional practices each time you introduce students to a new center or center activity.

Teaching My Students to Use a Literacy Center and/or Activity in the Center		
Objective	How will I state my expectations?	
Activity Description	Have students completed a similar activity?	
Materials	What are the materials for this center/activity? How are they organized?	
Explicit Instruction	Will I introduce the center/activity to a whole group or a small group?	
	What is the purpose of the center/activity?	
	What are the rules and procedures for this center/activity?	
Teacher Modeling	How will I model the activity?	
Guided Practice	Will I give my students a chance to try the activity before I expect them to do it independently?	
	Did I sufficiently model the activity?	
	How will I be sure the students understand what they are supposed to do?	
Independent Practice	Did I teach the skill more than once before I asked students to work independently?	
	How will I monitor the activity?	
Monitor Progress	How will I determine whether the student learned the concept or mastered the skill?	
	How will I adjust my instruction accordingly?	

Adapted from Allen, I., & Peery, S. (2000). *Literacy centers.* Huntington Beach, CA: Creative Teaching Press.

FIGURE 3.15

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"The number of possible literacy centers is limited only by your imagination"
(SCHULMAN & PAYNE, 2000, P. 70).

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There are a number of books filled with suggestions for organizing and implementing literacy centers. Many of these books are listed in the reference section at the end of this manual. Your job as the professional is to discern the value of the suggested educational experience and determine its worth to your students.

Use this checklist (FIGURE 3.16) to evaluate the processes, procedures, structure, and activities in your literacy centers. Enter a minus, check, or plus mark for each item as it pertains to each center in your classroom.

Not at all descriptive of the center —	Somewhat descriptive of the center ✓	Very descriptive of the center +
Evaluate the Process		
The center is designed so that students can manage and complete the work independently.		
The activities emphasize application of previously-taught skills rather than teaching new skills.		
The activities are open-ended. There are multiple entry points, multiple paths to solutions, and multiple possible outcomes.		
The center supports the literacy goals I set for my students. The link to my reading and language arts curriculum is posted in each center and for each activity.		
The center provides an opportunity for my students to read, write, listen, and/or speak.		
Evaluate the Procedures		
Students know what to do when they need supplies or materials.		
Students know what to do with completed products.		
Students know how to use the center and my expectations for their learning.		
Students know how to clean up and reorganize the center for the next students.		
Students know how to work without disturbing others.		
Students know how to make the transition between activities.		
Adapted from Kingore, B. (2004). *Centers in minutes!* Austin, TX: Professional Associates Publishing; Marriott, D. (1997). *What are the other kids doing while you teach small groups?* Cypress, CA: Creative Teaching Press.		

FIGURE 3.16

"It is through the use of a variety of grouping strategies that teachers address students' needs, skills, and motivations in learning literacy"
(REUTZEL, 1999, P. 273).

Grouping strategy: **Whole group (mixed ability)**

Group composition: Entire class, heterogeneous group

Instructional focus
- Introduce new ideas, concepts, vocabulary
- Review recently taught skills and strategies
- Provide modeling through read alouds
- Develop cross-curricular themes
- Discuss shared experience
- Model and demonstrate the writing process

Activities
- Read alouds
- Shared reading (big books, charts)
- Shared writing
- Author's Chair
- Performances
- Word Wall activities

Grouping strategy: **Small groups (mixed ability)**

Group composition: Small, heterogeneous groups of two to five students

Group assignment: Teacher assigns students to groups or students select their own group, depending on the task objective.

Instructional focus
- Academic achievement
- Social development

Activities
- Literature circles (book clubs)
- Interest groups
- Partner reading
- Group retellings
- Jigsaw (each group completes a portion of a class project)
- Readers Theater
- Project groups

Grouping strategy: **Flexible small groups (same ability)**

Group composition: Homogeneous group of three to six students.

Group assignment: Teacher varies group membership based on individual student needs.

Instructional focus
- Guided reading instruction targeted to students' specific needs
- Activities that allow students to practice and extend what they are learning
- Performance tasks

Grouping strategy: **Student pairs**

Group composition: Groups of two students

Group assignment: Teacher assigns student pairs or students select their own partners, depending on the task objective.

Instructional focus
- Reading fluency
- Peer tutoring

Activities
- Students each have copies of the text and take turns reading and rereading

Grouping strategy: **One-to-one**

Group composition: Teacher and student

Instructional focus
- Instruction targeted to student's needs

Activities
- Teacher-student conference
- Writing conference
- Portfolio conference
- Progress monitoring

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"Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading"
(NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY, 2001, P. 48).

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To monitor student comprehension, teach strategies and then observe students as they read. Observe the student in multiple settings with different types of texts. Ask yourself questions about the student's use of the strategy.

Setting a purpose for reading
- Does the student preview the title and illustrations to determine a purpose for reading?
- Can the student use prior knowledge in combination with previewing of text to determine his or her own purpose for reading?

Fix-up strategies
- Does the student self-monitor while reading?
- Where did the student encounter the problem?
- Why did the student have difficulty with comprehension?
- Which fix-up strategy did the student use?
- Is the text too difficult for the student to use when learning a comprehension strategy?

Background knowledge
- Is the student able to activate prior knowledge on a given topic?
- Is the subject familiar or unfamiliar?
- Is the student interested in the topic?
- Is the student able to form questions based on the topic?

Reading expository text
- Does the student examine the title before reading?
- Does the student examine the headings and subheadings before reading?
- Does the student examine the visual aids before reading? Which visual aids capture the student's attention?
- Does the student examine italicized and boldfaced words before reading?
- Does the student examine the introduction and the conclusion before reading?
- Is the student able to form questions based on the topic?
- Is the student able to confirm new learning based on his or her reading about the topic?

Comparing and contrasting two different texts
- Can the student identify similarities between two texts?
- Can the student identify differences between two texts?
- How does the student record or report the similarities and differences?
- What does the student notice?
- What level of support did the student need to use the strategy?

Adapted from Region 4 Education Service Center. (2003a). *Comprehension instruction.* Houston, TX: Author.