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**Small Group Instruction as a Differentiating Instruction Strategy: 4 Tips to Remember**

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Research into the effectiveness of mathematics education by the Institute of Education Sciences in 2010 ([Slavin, Lake, and Groff](http://www.bestevidence.org/word/math_Jan_05_2010_guide.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)) found that programs that are designed to change daily instructional practices and implement differentiating instruction strategies are most effective. Their research also discovered that small group instruction and cooperative learning have a significant impact on student achievement.

Because small group instruction is a highly effective differentiating instruction strategy it is widely used in elementary classrooms. Teachers who already use this strategy know that successful implementation doesn’t happen overnight. The work involved in preparing students to operate within a small group instruction model takes time and patience. But the work will pay off!
As you prepare to use [small group instruction](http://dayintheclassroom.edublogs.org/2011/03/06/making-math-easy-with-small-group-instruction/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) in your classroom remember to:

**1. Work on building stamina**

Small group instruction, when implemented effectively, requires students to work independently when not with the teacher. The stamina for this type of independent work doesn’t happen immediately. Take time at the beginning of the school year to build student stamina though progressively increasing the amount of time they spend in small group instruction.

**2. Establish strong management routines**

Working with students to establish strong management routines is just as important as building stamina. Students should know and understand your expectations for small group instruction and independent work including material management, work completion procedures, and methods for requesting help. Taking the time to establish and practice these routines will pay off with highly engaged learners.

**3. Use frequent formative assessment**

One of the most important characteristics of small group instruction is using assessment wisely. Ongoing assessment is one of the greatest assets to differentiating instruction strategies. It allows you to know, in real time, what students have mastered and what they are still struggling with. It also provides information on how you can adapt grouping to best meet the needs of all learners. Forget about assessment as a cumbersome task. Asking a group of students to complete a math problem on white boards and then making note of their strategies and solutions is an example of a quick and easy assessment.

**4. Know who needs you most**

Make sure you use your assessment data to know who needs the most teacher time and who has already reached mastery and can extend their learning independently. This doesn’t mean you won’t ever meet with your mastery students, it simply means they may not spend as much time in direct instruction. After struggling students complete a lesson with the teacher, they may work on an assessment based computer program.

DreamBox Learning offers engaging [computer based activities](http://www.dreambox.com/k-8-math-lessons%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) that correlate with the Common Core State Standards. These activities are designed to meet the needs of learners and align with the classroom curriculum.They provide an additional mode of learning and a proven way to implement differentiating instruction strategies.