STIR Education
Micro-Innovations
that raise results

MIXED ABILITY
GROUPING
**STIR EDUCATION**

At STIR Education, our belief is that the best way to improve the quality of education is to empower teachers and principals. As the people closest to the challenges of providing all children a high quality education, teachers and principals are uniquely placed to lead change in the education system.

STIR has two very simple ideas about how to do this:

1. By identifying the teachers and principals who have created successful, innovative practices – what we call ‘micro-innovations’ to improve education in their schools and recognising their efforts publicly.

2. By creating an ecosystem that enables those micro-innovations to be shared with other teachers and schools – through partner organisations and teacher networks – and that encourages and inspires the development of additional micro-innovations.

By identifying teachers’ innovations and building the STIR network of teachers – what will become India’s most creative community of teachers - our aim is to improve the quality of education for over 1 million children in the next three years.

This guide introduces just five of our micro-innovations:

We hope that it inspires you to introduce a similar idea in your classroom, to share your own micro-innovations with STIR and to join the STIR network of innovative educators!

---

**CHITRA KASHYAP AND ANJUMAN ISLAM – GANGOTRI PUBLIC SCHOOL**

Anjuman teaches English and Chitra teaches Hindi at Gangotri Public School. Both teachers believe strongly in the need for teachers to collaborate and cooperate with each other and in the need for teachers to support each other to try new ideas.

Gangotri Public School is located in Brahmapuri in Seelampur, a slum community in East Delhi. 800 students attend the school and pay fees of Rs500 per month. The majority of students are first generation learners and the teachers at Gangotri are committed to providing them with an education that significantly improves their life chances.
HOW CAN I TEACH A LARGE CLASS OF MIXED ABILITY STUDENTS?

Chitra and Anjuman managed to keep all students learning by organising the students in their classes into small, mixed groups of high and low ability students. The more able students who finished their work quickly had to wait for others to catch up; at other times, the lower ability children would get left behind. In both cases, students would often vent their frustration by disturbing the rest of the class.

“We really needed a way to help all students to learn without preventing the higher ability students from completing the curriculum.”

CHITRA AND ANJUMAN’S SOLUTION: PEER LEARNING IN MIXED ABILITY GROUPS IN SCHOOL

Chitra and Anjuman developed a solution that builds on the learning of more able students by giving them opportunities to support the less able.

DO THESE CHALLENGES SOUND FAMILIAR?

Chitra and Anjuman managed to keep all students learning by organising the students in their classes into small, mixed groups of high and low ability students. They make it the responsibility of higher-ability students to help out their peers once they have completed their own task. The value of this micro-innovation is that it benefits all students – higher ability students learn and develop their own understanding by teaching others and lower-ability students benefit from the additional support. This micro-innovation recognizes that students are a valuable resource for each other and that, often, students are able to explain concepts in a way that their peers will easily understand. help students work together in a positive way. It does take work to help them learn to do this and at first they may not cooperate well with each other.”
Could you introduce mixed ability groups in your classroom? How can you ensure that your brightest students are not getting frustrated and that your low ability students are not getting left behind?

You could form mixed ability groups in your classroom in exactly the same way that Chitra and Anjuman did (see Step by Step guide) or you could develop your own system to make sure that all students in your class are learning throughout the day. Whatever you do, making the most of all the available learning time for all students is very important!

Anjuman and Chitra have three key pieces of advice for teachers planning to implement mixed-ability grouping in their classrooms:

1. For mixed ability grouping to be really successful, it is important to put real effort into creating a culture in your classroom where students are supportive of each other and are not afraid to make mistakes – that is how we learn!

2. It is really important to give students very clear guidance and expectations about how they should work together. You may wish to give students special training in supporting each other; students being supported at any time must know that the supporting students can help them with their work and answer questions but will not do the work for them.

3. Make sure that it is clear to students that different students can be in the supporting role at different times – students who are at a higher level in maths may be different than students who are at a higher level in English.

Anjuman and Chitra’s innovation has been successful because it recognises that students are a valuable learning resource for each other and that, often, students are able to explain concepts in a way that their peers will understand. Mixed ability grouping helps students to become teachers and to develop their understanding through having to explain it to others.
**MIXED ABILITY GROUPING**

**STEP BY STEP GUIDE**

**PREPARATION AND RESOURCES REQUIRED**

1. **DEVELOP A SEATING PLAN FOR THE CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS** that groups students according to their ability (this could vary depending on the subject). If you can, use data from tests to support you in creating the groups – this will help to ensure a genuine mix of learning levels.

2. **PLAN TIME INTO YOUR LESSON PLANS** for students to work together and support each other.

Anjuman and Chitra encourage peer learning in their classrooms in the following way.

1. **Ask students to sit according to your new seating plan.** Think about whether students will work well together as well as about their learning levels when putting children in groups.

2. **Set very clear expectations** with the students such as:
   a) Be polite with peers while supporting each other to learn.
   b) Guide your buddies with the work but do not complete their work for them.
   c) Ask the teacher if you are both stuck! It is a good thing to ask for help as long as you have thought about the problem first.

3. **Assign work** to students.

4. If certain students in each group finish the task first, they become responsible for helping others. However, those finishing their own work should check it carefully first to ensure they have completed the tasks to the best of their ability.

5. **As a teacher**, you should support them, and walk around the room monitoring student progress. Encourage students not just with their academic work but also to work well together.
WHAT DO OTHER TEACHERS SAY?

POSITIVE BENEFITS:

“I have noticed that students are now very keen to support each other with their learning and that those who finish work quickly are now more fully occupied and continue to learn through helping their buddies.”

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME:

“It can be really tough to help students work together in a positive way. It does take work to help them learn to do this and at first they may not cooperate well with each other.”