# Grouping Options

## What are the grouping options?

1.  Streaming / Ability grouped class assignment (Hong Kong)

    - Assigns students to one class on the basis of ability / achievement.

    - Individual differences within the streamed class still exist + serious labelling effect.

2.  *Ability grouping for selected subjects (Hong Kong)*

    - Regrouping students according to achievement level for one or some subjects (e.g. English, Chinese, Math).

    - Requires special time-tabling (e.g. all English classes at the same year level at the same time).

3.  *Within-class ability grouping (Hong Kong)*

    (a) Mastery learning group

      Flexible within-class grouping

    (b) Independent study

      Some individual students follow an individual instructional plan, usually allowing for flexible pacing and continuous progress

4.  Special classes

    - Classes for students with learning problems (e.g. IRTP) / academically talented students

    - Can be treated as stand-alone class with specialist(s).

5.  Non-graded plans / Joplin Plan

    - Flexible grouping by performance level instead of age

    - Very complicated school administration, teacher deployment and time-tabling

### Within-class ability grouping / Grouping within class

*There are different ways of within-class ability grouping. However, it is different from mixed ability grouping which is proven an ineffective measure (for single prolonged use) for the high ability students.*

*Mixed ability grouping (using the bright students to teach others) may overlook the learning needs of talented students.*
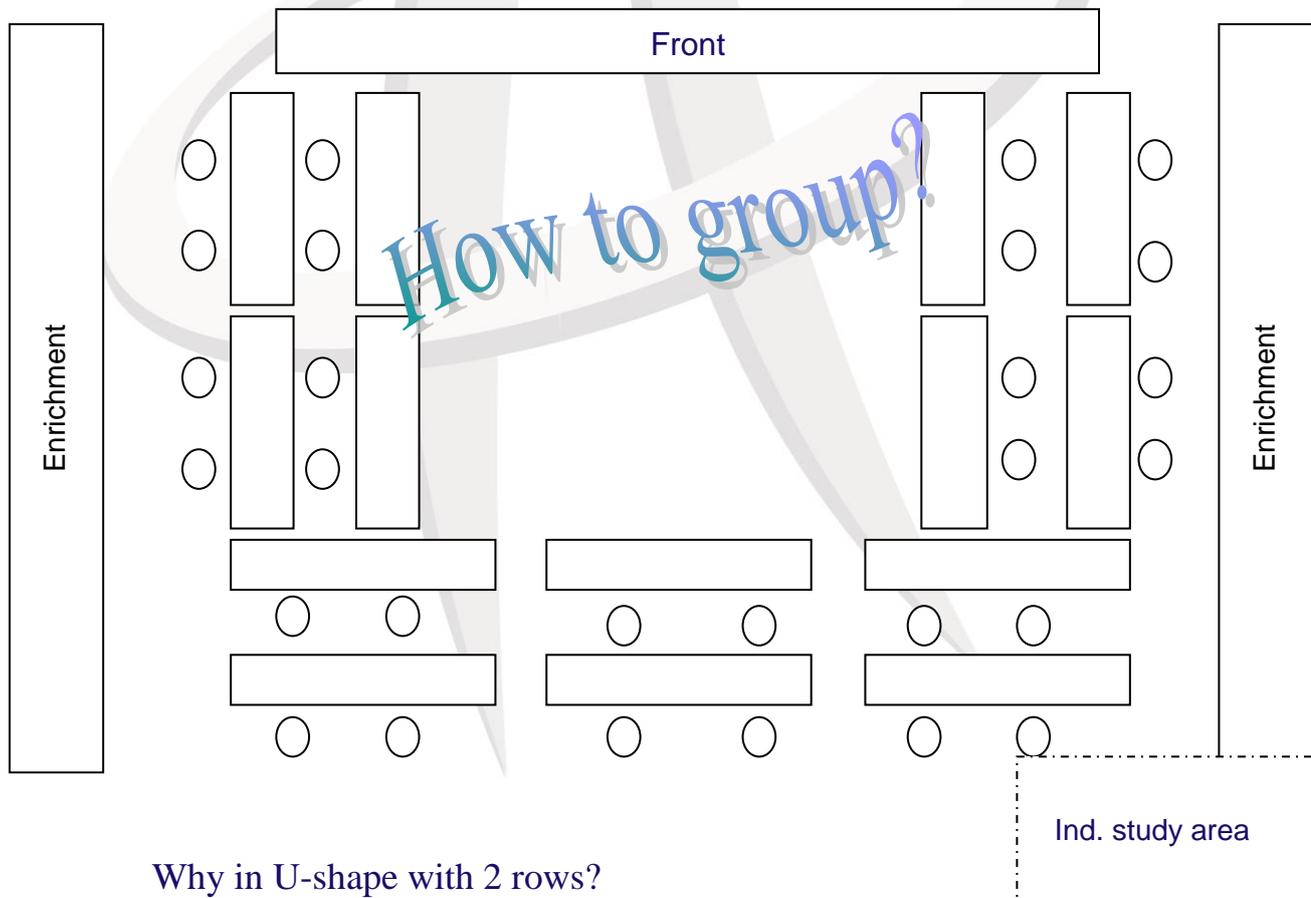*Many people believe that intellectually gifted students have poor social skills and thus needs socialising opportunities.*   (Slavin, 1986; Robinson, 1990; Feldhusen & Moon, 2004; VanTassel-Baska, 2004)

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**Clarification of myths:**

1. A variety of ability grouping system can *enhance* students' learning.

2. Grouping by ability does not necessarily create significant/ harmful impact on the self-esteem or socio-emotional development if the grouping system is a *flexible* one. Grouping by ability produces a positive attitude towards subject matter.

3. Ability grouping without curriculum and instructional provisions is useless. Therefore, ability grouping should be activated through *differentiated instruction*.

4. *No* growth of the high-ability group if they mix with the low-ability students.

5. The claim that mixing ability groups provides important models for less able students cannot be supported because low ability students do *not* model their behaviour on gifted students.

(VanTassel-Baska, 2004)

*PRACTICE*: Case study in Hong Kong: 7 groups of 4 (KLA-based)



Why in U-shape with 2 rows?

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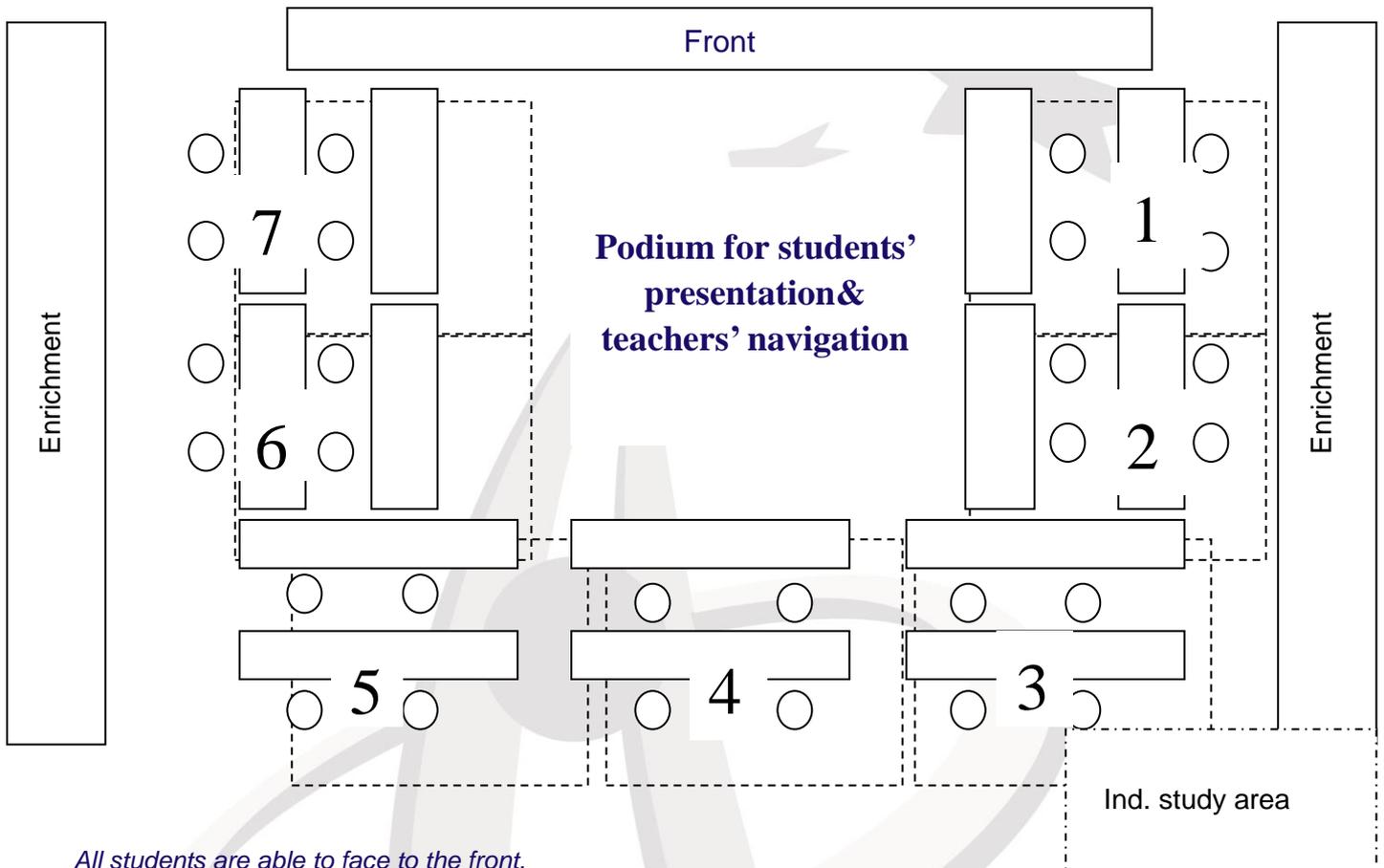
*All students are able to face to the front.*
*The students on the front row turn around for group work.*
*Enrichment: extended reading, challenging tasks, independent learning task, student work display.*

| Option 1 | Option 2 |
|---|---|
| Group 7: low ability | Groups 1, 2, 5, 6, 7: mixed ability |
| Groups 3 & 4: high ability | Groups 3 & 4: high ability |
| Groups 1, 2, 5, 6: mainstream | |

Groups 3-4: Anchor activity / tiered task can be assigned while others are working on the mainstream curriculum. Some profoundly bright students can even work on their own on their seat or go to the independent study area where there are enrichment materials on the bench aside.

** *Regular review and adjustment of Groups 3 & 4* (e.g. every month): "flexible grouping"
- Membership may change: some bright mainstream students may enter while some low-performing ones may exit. This encourages the members to stay motivated while it is a hope for others to strive for excellence.
- More group(s) could be regarded as high ability if there are more 8 high ability students as time goes by. In a real case, there are 4 high-ability groups at the end of the school year.

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## References

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Slavin, R.W. (1986). Best-evidence synthesis: An alternative to meta-analytic and traditional reviews. *Educational Researcher, 15* (9), 5-11.

VanTassel-Baska, J. (2004). Education decision making on acceleration and grouping. In L.E. Brody (Ed.), *Grouping and acceleration practices in gifted education*. (pp. 69-79). California: Corwin Press.

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