

Heterogeneous and Homogeneous Classrooms: Questions, Opinions, and Proposals

* Thomas Mariano (tjmariano@hotmail.com):

A proposed pilot of CPMP in my school for Fall, 2000 is looking very promising, and I am getting excited. My CPMP pilot proposes mixing the three non-accelerated levels of incoming ninth graders (about 20% of the class). Although the school administrators seem particularly supportive about this idea, mixing levels is not a popular idea with some of my colleagues.

Our ninth graders typically have taken one of four courses:

- 1) Preparation for NY State Integrated Math I ("Regents-Transition" Level)
- 2) NY State Integrated Math I (Regents Level),
- 3) NY State Integrated Math I (Honors Level), or
- 4) NY State Integrated Math II (Regents or Honors Level - for accelerated students who took NY I in 8th grade)

My CPMP pilot proposes selecting a stratified random sample from the populations of the first 3 levels representing the proportions of those levels in our incoming ninth grade class (using 8th grade math teacher recommendations). Historically, we have not seen much of a difference between the students' abilities in levels 2 and 3, because the really strong students were accelerated before ninth grade. But, there is a strong perceived difference between those students and the majority of students in level 1. Hence, some math teachers in my department support mixing levels 2 and 3, but not mixing in level 1.

I am posing some very specific questions. Please, do not respond with general research or "ed-speak" on the pros/cons of mixing levels. I want to hear about concrete instances of successful implementations of CPMP (no other programs, please) that do mix levels of students as I am proposing.

Have the historically lowest achieving students "risen to the challenge?"

Have all levels been appropriately challenged in the same classroom?

Does your school offer a ninth grade Core Plus preparation course to be followed by Core Plus Course 1 in tenth grade? If so, please describe it.

Do you have a "math support" program that runs alongside Course 1 for the weakest students? How does that work?

We are especially concerned about the new NY State assessment ("Math A") that is a significantly more difficult graduation requirement for about 20% of our students. I am hopeful that the CPMP approach might have some success where traditional mastery models have failed.

* Jacqueline Martin (jmartin@iris.mtvernon.wednet.edu) on January 10, 2000:

I think that it would be feasible for you to mix your middle two levels. I imagine that CPMP is

going to be far too challenging for your preintegrated kids. We have only two levels here. We have the Integrated track and a "PreIntegrated " level where we are using Mathematics in Context middle level materials. We are in our first year of implementation. Our accelerated students start the Integrated track in the 8th grade.

* Robert Lovell (rdlovell314@yahoo.com):

The six high schools in Fort Wayne, IN have eliminated tracking. All of our ninth graders (other than those who were accelerated and started Core Plus in grade 8) are enrolled in Course 1. This is our second year in the program. It is the opinion of the majority of our teachers that the mathematical content of Course 1 is not beyond the grasp of the students. Our bigger concern is Course 2 where the mathematical content becomes significantly more difficult. All students in our system must pass two years of mathematics, and we presently offer no alternative to Core Plus.

The major concern of teachers is keeping groups on task. Many of the poor math students have very poor social skills. Teachers must CONTINUALLY monitor group work. All nine math teachers in my building are teaching CURSE ONE- whoops a Freudian slip. It is hard work. Some teachers, who until now were teaching upper-level courses, have had their eyes opened. The computer was especially unkind to me this semester and I have two classes of students that are difficult to manage. (60% of these students previously would have been placed in a dumbed-down class; that is where we used to send troublemakers.)

The real challenge is not to let the mathematical level of these classes slip and thus hurt the "good" kids. Failure rate will be about 50% in these classes.

However --- Core Plus is the right thing for kids.

* Marcia Weller Weinhold (math_cpmp1st@wmich.edu) on January 12, 2000:

It sounds like the Fort Wayne teachers are working hard and doing the right thing to make CPMP/CMIC work. It will get better. One of our Michigan schools had the opinion that students learn more mathematics failing Core Plus than they learned passing the course formerly taught. And, they were vindicated when some of the students actually went on to pass Courses 2 and 3 because they finally decided to do the work.

* (gregoryr@ICEBERG.ORG) on January 25, 2000

How do you deal with the workload of teaching an intense program like IMP and "differentiating" your classes for roughly three levels of students?

* Michael Soguero (TioMikel@AOL.COM) on January 25, 2000:

I eschew the notion of levels. There are not three levels in my class but 30 different learners. I

set up flexible portfolio assessments that allow students to demonstrate what they know, what they are learning, and what they have come to understand by the end of the course. This type of assessment allows me to monitor, diagnose, interact, etc.

Don't get me wrong – it is far from perfect. It is a lot of work and I have plenty of struggles. Every year gets better.

* Dan Branham (DanLeeannB@AOL.COM) on January 20, 2000:

I have had limited experience in a homogeneous classroom, but I think if you had a truly homogeneous class, it would be a great experience for those students who are academically superior. The instructor would be able to cover information at a faster rate and set higher expectations for the group. You wouldn't need to worry about the "slower" students needing more time, etc.

I think that homogeneous grouping is not at all helpful for students who are low achieving. Our district made a decision a few years ago to have all students who fail a semester of Algebra 1 or Geometry to repeat that semester immediately. So, at the beginning of the second semester of the school year, any student who failed the first semester is taken out of his/her present math class, is assigned a new teacher, and must repeat the first semester content beginning in Chapter 1 of the text. He/she will begin the second semester (pending a passing grade) of the math course in the next fall semester or during summer school. (We do have some students who continue to take the first semester of Algebra 1 several times.)

Most of the classes that I teach are supposed to be heterogeneous, but my feeling is that the GATE programs ("gifted students") siphon off the top layer of the heterogeneous group to begin with, and the "heterogeneous" classes are really without the high achieving students they need to be heterogeneous.

[For more discussion, see **IMP to Calculus**.]