

## **Student Achievement and Student Assignments**

March 1, 2011-James D. Martin, Ph.D.

I am very pleased to hear that student achievement is being given serious consideration as a component of the student assignment plan.

Anyone who has ever been in the classroom knows that diversity in the levels of student achievement, is productive for education.

There are times when students should be grouped with like achievement levels, both to push advanced students to their highest capability, and to advance remedial students to theirs.

However, if you only teach advanced students, there is a real tendency to speed through material...you know, the fun complex stuff, forgetting to ensure a strong foundation in the fundamentals. For example, I have worked with too many students who have been through AP Calculus, but never built a strong foundation in Algebra.

Similarly teaching a group of low achievers, given that achievement and motivation are highly correlated, tends to exacerbate a culture of apathy. Anything more than about 10% low achievers in a classroom is very destructive to the learning environment.

Segregation by achievement is generally counterproductive for all cohorts.

By contrast appropriate integration by achievement level can dramatically enhance achievement.

Just last week I had several students in my office reviewing material before an exam. I had a mix of mid-to-high achievers and low achievers. I provided some input, but largely I was able to watch the students working together, with the higher achievers reinforcing their fundamentals while the low achievers had some breakthroughs in both content and understanding how to approach learning...this would not have taken place with video conferencing.

Ensuring settings where learning takes place with both focused and integrated achievement levels is critical for quality education.

Given this, I must conclude by asking why, with the recognition of the need to integrate student achievement, are we opening Walnut Creek Elementary School with ~53% of the students below grade level?

As my wife's close high school friend, now a teacher in a school with a large underserved population said... "Wow---Really? A teacher's [and I will add student's] nightmare!"