GK	Hello Christina and hello Listeners. Welcome! This is Session 5 in Module 3 of your TALE Academy learning experience, Flexible Grouping: Inclusion for All Students. Before you get started with today's session, have you completed Module 3, Session 4? If not, we recommend you do so before engaging in this session. If you have, you'll recall that this is the first of three sessions devoted to specific HLPs, or high leverage practices. Flexible grouping is just one of the 22 HLPs.
CLH	Hello, Gina! And again I'm going to point out that 22 is a lot of HLPs! Education is definitely not for the faint of heart. With that in mind,, here are some definitions to review before we jump into the session.. The first term is ableism. Ableism is defined by the Center for Disability Rights as "a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be 'fixed' in one form or the other."
GK	The second term is cogenerative dialogue. Cogenerative dialogue is defined by the New York City Department of Education as "conversations in which educators and students come together to discuss the classroom experience. These conversations turn up some profound insights into the nature of the classroom because students and the teacher discuss what they see in the classroom, and the personal experiences of participants (things often left unsaid or ignored) are brought to the forefront."
CLH	The next term is tracking. Tracking is defined by the National Association of Secondary School Principals as "a method used by many secondary schools to group students according to their perceived ability, IQ, or achievement levels. Students are placed in high, middle, or low tracks in an effort to provide them with a level of curriculum and instruction that is appropriate to their needs. The practice of tracking began in the 1930s and has been the subject of intense controversy in the past 20 years."
GK	Our final term is ability grouping.

	Ability grouping is defined by the United States Department of Education as "the assignment of students to classes or instructional groups based upon the students' level of ability or achievement." Now that we've created that base for today's learning, let's explore stigma, tracking, and special education.
CLH	In a 2014 publication on "Urban special education policy and the lived experience of stigma in a high school science classroom," researcher Chris Hale critiqued federal, state, and local policies around special education that, in his analysis, supported ableism and resulted in negative self-perceptions among students receiving special education services. He begins the publication by sharing excerpts of a co-generative dialogue between four 9th-grade science students attending a New York high school and their science teacher. The dialogue was recorded on camera with the permission of the students and their guardians. In one part of the dialogue, two students in the group "discover" that they are in a "special education class" when other students explain that "Miss G" – a teacher who is frequently in the classroom working with students – is a special education teacher.
GK	One student nervously says: "Oh, God. That means we're special ed. " Another gasps and says: "We're special ed." She is seen shaking her head and looking down. The first student clarifies with her teacher: "That doesn't mean...So, does that mean we're special ed?" And a third student looks around at the group and reports: "No. You're special ed." Hale then explains that none of the students in the dialogue were classified as students with disabilities and therefore eligible to receive special education services. But their honest responses to learning that their science class was a special education class illustrate the stigma associated with being "special ed." Hale states, "Special education represents the attachment of disability to children's identities."
CLH	Without further context, what we can interpret from the data that Hale presents is that the 9th-grade class was designed to be inclusive. The students, however, perceived their grouping as based on the practice of tracking students. The practice, which began in the 1930s, is described by the National Association of Secondary School

	Principals as "a method that groups students according to perceived ability, IQ, or achievement levels." Is that or is that not the same as things as flexible grouping?
GK	Based on this negative form of grouping students – tracking – it would seem odd that one of the high-leverage practices, or HLPs, recommended for supporting special education students currently is flexible grouping. In fact, the term has turned off many teachers and advocates out of concern that it is simply the latest form of tracking. So let's start by unpacking what flexible grouping is and is not, how it can be properly and effectively implemented, and how it can benefit every student in an inclusive classroom, regardless of ability.
CLH	The advocacy group Understood describes flexible grouping as using "a mix of heterogeneous groups (made up of students with varying skill levels) and homogeneous groups (made up of students with similar skill levels) to help students achieve a learning goal." One of the things that makes flexible grouping significantly different from tracking is the purpose and length of time the grouping is used: "Students work together…only for the length of time necessary for them to develop an identified skill or to complete a learning activity." While the group of students is working towards a common learning goal, learner variability is accounted for and supported by teachers. A primary positive outcome of flexible grouping is that we can reduce the impact of stigma related to other forms of grouping, such as tracking. Understood explains that "Students who struggle don't feel singled out or embarrassed. Because groups change frequently and aren't based on ability level alone, all students have the chance to get to know and work with each other." Last thing, flexible grouping has been shown to increase student cohesion, expose students to new and divergent perspectives, and increase learning outcomes for all students.
GK	That's awesome. The thing to remember about the effectiveness of flexible grouping is this: it is only a positive high-leverage practice when practiced effectively. The CEEDAR publication "High-Leverage Practices in Special Education", released in 2017, defines flexible grouping, which is HLP #17, as a practice in which teachers do the following: - Assign students to homogeneous and heterogeneous groups based on explicit learning goals - Monitor peer interactions - Provide positive and corrective feedback to support productive learning

	● Use small learning groups to accommodate learning differences ● Promote in-depth, academic-related interactions ● Teach students to work collaboratively ● Choose tasks that require collaboration ● Issue directives that promote productive and autonomous group interactions ● Embed strategies that maximize learning opportunities and equalize participation ● Promote simultaneous interactions ● Use procedures to hold students accountable for collective and individual learning, **and** ● Monitor and sustain group performance through proximity and positive feedback
CLH	I guess the question is, how can you make flexible grouping a high-leverage practice in your classroom? Flexible grouping requires effective planning. Teachers can embed this in their overall planning processes by unit, lesson, activity, etc. The important note here is that the groupings should change throughout the school year. The guidepost for forming groups begins with a clear understanding of what you want your students to learn by using planning strategies like essential questions and backwards design. So our planning needs to be really explicit. Here are some questions to ask when planning for flexible grouping.
GK	**What**: What is the purpose of this group activity? What do you want the group to do and learn? **When**: How long is this group going to work together? Sometimes a quick activity needs 15-20 minutes of work time, whereas larger projects or investigations can take weeks. (This goes back to determining the WHAT of your student learning.) **Who?** Which students, with which characteristics, will make the grouping a success? How many will be the best fit for the activity? A lab activity may be best suited with four students in a group, whereas a long project with many different parts may need six students or more. **Why?** Group formation should match your purpose, or your WHAT. Do you want your groups to be homogeneous (students with the same characteristics), or do you want

	the groups to be heterogeneous (students each bringing something different to the table)? **How?** When putting the groups together, are you making the groups, or are you letting your students make their groups? If you want students to self-select, setting some parameters on how students make that choice can avoid any conflicts or hurt feelings. **Where?** Will the students work together in the physical classroom or online or a blend of both?
CLH	When these parameters are set, it becomes a much more fluid practice. Students will get used to working with an elbow partner during a mini-lesson or look forward to joining a group of their choice based on their subject-area interests. The flexibility inherent in these groupings provides students with much-needed motivation to learn and supports their social emotional health while doing so. Let's pause for a moment, and let me ask you a question: Do you use the workshop model?
GK	I do and I love it. And experience has taught me that a huge factor of success is student grouping. For example, many use the workshop model to achieve gradual release of responsibility, in which "cognitive work should shift slowly and intentionally from teacher modeling, to joint responsibility between teachers and students, to independent practice and application by the learner." *I do, we do, y'all do, you do.* As you design groups to support that shift towards independence, flexible grouping will allow you to monitor student progress and change groupings to help scaffold their evolving skills and cognition. For example, if a handful of students are struggling with a particular concept, consider spreading them out across heterogeneous groups. A student who is struggling in one group may quickly learn a skill or concept when working with students who can share their learning experience in different modalities, such as visual, auditory, physical, etc.
CLH	Makes sense. Now what about using flexible grouping across learning environments? We know from previous TALE Academy sessions that we want to leverage flexible grouping in at least two ways: portable practices and integrative practices.
GK	Remind me again?
CLH	OK, portable practices are when we ask this: How can flexible grouping be made portable across learning environments (in other words., shifting from in-person to remote, remote to hybrid, etc.)?

	And our guiding question when thinking about integrative practices is: How can flexible grouping help us integrate the assets of different learning environments, or modalities, in order to supercharge our teaching?
GK	Oh that makes sense. Being able to work in digital spaces and/or being able to integrate digital practices.
	We want to keep everything we do high-leverage, too. Let's start at the top of the list with the "what": What is the purpose of this group activity? What do you want the group to do and learn? This must be answered first and remain the constant guidepost for planning.
	It sort of transcends the question of learning modality or tools.
	The next planning element question related to "when":
	How long is this group going to work together?
	To make flexible grouping portable, consider how to measure the length of an activity based on modality. For example, live collaboration on Zoom may require you to add a few minutes at the start for students to assemble in breakout groups. Alternatively, asynchronous collaboration may be measured by start and end times/dates with interactive deadlines.
	To make this an integrative practice, consider allowing groups to select their preferred modalities (in-person, remote synchronous, remote asynchronous), including working together across multiple modalities (some use Google Docs, others post videos, all share on a common learning management system such as Google Classroom).
CLH	Now, let's ask our planning element question related to "Who":
	Which students, with which characteristics, will make the grouping a success? How many will be the best fit for the activity?
	To make this practice portable, ask yourself what changes in group size do you need to make for students to effectively collaborate across learning environments? Does a group of six students working together around a table need to be pared back to three students working together through a shared document (for example, in Google Docs)?
	To make this an integrative practice, ask yourself can digital and web tools increase inclusion for groups? For example, can a home-bound student join a group through live streamed video or asynchronous collaboration?
GK	Now, let's ask our Why question:
	Do you want your groups to be homogeneous, meaning students with the same characteristics, or do you want the groups to be heterogeneous - each student

	bringing something different to the table? To make this practice portable, when thinking about heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings, consider students' preferences and expertise with particular learning tools and platforms. Can you use heterogenous grouping as an opportunity for students to "level up" on their use of digital tools? To make this an integrative practice, ask yourself, can digital tools from remote learning open up opportunities for different kinds of groupings? For example, can you group students with and without hearing-impairments by using assistive technologies and/or providing students with choice in terms of the "end product" that results from their collaboration?
CLH	Let's now ask our planning element question related to "how": Are you making the groups, or are you letting your students make their groups? To make this practice portable, consider allowing students to self-select based on options within a modality. For example, in remote learning, students can choose a group based on a shared interest in an app. Can you set up "room topics" for breakout groups in Zoom, set a maximum enrollment per breakout room, give students time to consider their preferences, and then open up the rooms for them to join? To make this an integrative practice, ask yourself can you use tools to guide self-selection processes so that they are fair and equitable? For example, you can use Nearpod to set up a series of polling questions that allow students to self-assess their readiness for an activity, interest in different aspects of the activity, and preferred modality. Display the data anonymously without student names and allow students to form heterogeneous or homogeneous groups based on the data.
GK	Will the students work together in the physical classroom or online or a blend of both? To make this practice portable, if your students will be moving across learning environments from in-person to remote or vice versa, ask students to give their groups a name. Designate specific locations in the classroom, such as a table, where they regularly convene. When you shift to remote live, use those location names for the breakout rooms in Zoom, designate areas within a Bitmoji classroom, or identify in which shared document they will be working. For asynchronous remote, use the group names to establish collaborative tools, such as discussion board threads. To make this an integrative practice, consider allowing students to be "together" across learning environments. This can mean live streaming a home-bound student, as previously noted, or it can mean allowing a student who is nonverbal to use assistive technologies and/or digital tools to express themselves and contribute during in-person instruction. Being "there" may look different for different students and

	allow them to tap into their individual assets.
CLH	That was really a lot! The what, who, why, when, how and where of flexible grouping, no matter where you teach. Anybody who wants a closer look can either read the podcast transcript, or check out the READ option for this session, which is an article with nice graphics.
GK	Yeah, sometimes you just gotta see it.
CLH	The goal of the TALE Academy is to help teachers rethink education so that everyone–students, families, educators, school leaders, and communities–all have the opportunity to succeed. You've just added another tool to your toolbox when you use flexible grouping to foster inclusion for all students. Thanks for listening. Now it's your turn to make selection from the choice board to keep learning! BYE!