

PATHWAYS

TIPS FOR MULTI-GRADE MANAGEMENT

GRADES 1- 6

The flexibility contained in **Pathways** allows for the combining, grouping and cycling needed to manage the multi-grade classroom. Each multi-grade configuration is unique from school-to-school and year-to-year. A teacher with grades 1-6 will have a different approach than a teacher with just two grades. The balance of enrollment in the classroom also affects planning. The teacher, of course, will adjust the approach according to the configuration and needs of each year's group.

GROUPING

Research has affirmed the many advantages of a multi-grade approach for teaching children in the primary grades. We know that children mature at different rates, learn at different paces and approach the learning process with varying degrees of background experiences. The multi-grade classroom offers an ideal setting to allow children to learn and develop at their optimal pace. While some children progress at a predictable, steady rate, others may excel in one area while functioning at a much lower level in another. Children needing more time for mastery can review and reinforce concepts at their learning level while the needs of children requiring enrichment can also be met in the multi-age, multi-level classroom.

Multi-level Grouping - There are segments of **Pathways** that lend well to including all students, regardless of grade level. This forum provides for a rich variety of instructional activities. Specific activities centering on the monthly theme, teacher read alouds, writing strategies, cross-curricular activities, comprehension strategies and some target skills can be whole group activities. This is also a good time for modeling of writing strategies and expressive reading as well as providing an audience for Radiant Readers, Author's Chair and reporting on self-selected reading. Students benefit from the support of the whole group.

Flexible Small Groups - Students with common needs or interests can be divided into small groups varying in size depending on the group's purpose. At times, these groups will naturally occur according to grade level for level-appropriate skills; foundational skills are especially important for the first grade. In other instances, the grouping can include a mixture of students in different grades to meet individual developmental levels as well as working on theme related projects. These groups are intended to be short-term, lasting only until specific goals are met.

Cooperative Learning Groups - The multi-grade classroom lends itself well to cooperative learning projects. Extensive research supports cooperative learning strategies. Most students learn more effectively when they work cooperatively rather than competitively. Retention increases dramatically when students are actively involved in their learning process. Self-esteem, acceptance of individual differences, leadership, conflict management, communication, listening skills and the ability of students to work with others are among the positive outcomes. Moreover, cooperative learning benefits students at all ability levels. As far as possible in small schools, cooperative groups should change when the activity is complete.

See the *Classroom Organization and Management* chapter in the **Pathways Teacher Manual** for more information on grouping and cooperative learning strategies.

ROTATING THEMES

The North American Division (NAD) has developed the NAD produced Bible and upper grades science curriculum to be taught on a four-year rotation in multi-grade classrooms. Other content areas have had materials such as the *SMART* and *SO SMART* notebooks for social studies and science that correlate the concepts into a four-year rotation. Multi-grade correlations are also available for art, math and music. *ARMS* for reading as well as the *SMALL SCHOOL ENGLISH* and *SPELLING* have been used extensively in multi-grade classrooms. These tools have effectively enabled whole group instruction

during the assigned class time as opposed to chopped-up segments in an effort to teach each grade level separately.

Recognizing that there is a specific sequence of skills required for students to become proficient readers and writers, **Pathways** is designed to allow for some combining across grade levels. The nine themes were specifically planned so that all grades can be in the same theme throughout the year. The theme book “sets the stage” for reading and writing activities for the month. In the multi-grade classroom, theme books can be used in a 2-4 year rotation according to the classroom configuration. However, be sure that the DOLs, phonics, handwriting and spelling skills are taught in the prescribed sequence. The teaching of the reading strategies for each grade level occurs during *Guided Reading*. *Reading Workshop* provides practice in reading with self-selected books at the individual reading levels while *Writing Workshop* provides independent writing time.

For example, the second grade Theme Book for theme 6 - The Environment - *Will We Miss Them?*, can be used for first and second graders or first through fourth graders. If some of the first grade students are not able to read the theme book yet, it can be read to them. Theme oriented activities will be at the student’s instructional level. Specific strategies and target skills introduced in the *Daily Lesson Guides* can be taught in whole groups, small groups, individually and/or mini-lessons. Reading Workshop and Writing Workshop can include the whole classroom, using the theme for inspiration while planning level appropriate reading and writing activities.

Instructional Components

DAILY ROUTINE

When themes are rotated, it is essential that the Target Skills, Daily Oral Language, spelling and handwriting be taught for each appropriate level. Within this *Multi-grade Management Tips* document is a compilation of these instructional components organized grade-by-grade within each theme.

Target Skills - The scope and sequence at each grade level is organized around five target areas:

Target 1 - Extended reading and writing

Target 2 - Comprehending, studying and evaluating ideas

Target 3 - Reference skills

Target 4 - Word study - vocabulary and word recognition

Target 5 - Sentence skills - usage, punctuation and grammar

Target Skills listed are introduced, taught and assessed at different levels as appropriate. The skills advance in complexity and can be taught simultaneously across skill levels. For example, in Target 2, Theme 1, sequencing is taught in all four grades with varying degrees of difficulty and is assessed in grade 4.

Daily Oral Language (DOL) - The Daily Oral Language component reviews and reinforces the grammar and mechanics instruction of **Pathways**. This strategy for teaching capitalization, punctuation, language usage and common spellings in a concise manner, only requires about 10 minutes per day. Students build strong oral language and proofreading skills as they correct the two sentences daily. The sentences are provided with errors for the students to correct using proof reader’s marks. The strength of the strategy lies in the dialogue that takes place as students and teacher correct the sentences together.

According to the configuration and needs of the students, the multi-grade teacher can combine or separate the groups for this activity. Many teachers choose to have the DOL sentences ready for students to correct at the beginning of the school day and then go over the corrections when the individual levels are called up for instructional time. DOL sentences can also be an effective tool for introducing the skills and concepts developed in *Writing Workshop*. The essential component is the interaction with the student(s), assuring comprehension of the concept before moving on to another.

Phonics - Due to the importance of building a strong foundation for literacy, it is essential that the scope and sequence of the **Pathways** phonics program be followed. Again, this can be done during the

time set aside for small group instruction. Combining across levels is recommended only if there are students needing to review concepts they have not completely mastered.

Handwriting - Legible handwriting is still an important part of communication. Combining across levels is possible after basic skills for manuscript and cursive are mastered. As always, practice should follow specific instruction and modeling by the teacher.

Spelling - First and second grade spelling lists are based on the sequence of skills in the *Pathways* phonics program. Third and fourth grade lists contain level appropriate words. In general, students will stay within their levels for spelling; however, there may individual students needing reinforcement or enrichment that would benefit by being placed in another level.

READING INSTRUCTION

Thematic Study - Strategic comprehension, discussion and vocabulary development are taught using the theme book. These strategies can be taught to the whole group, adjusting the activities for each appropriate developmental level.

Guided Reading - This component can be described as the “heart” of the reading instruction. The goal is for students to learn how to use reading strategies successfully and independently. Students meet with the teacher in small groups for lessons in comprehension, fluency and decoding. Students are grouped by reading level in groups that change as students develop reading proficiencies. This is when the multi-grade classroom has the advantage in meeting the individual student’s developmental needs.

The teacher will need to meet daily with the groups who have not mastered foundational skills, but less often with more proficient readers.

THE WORKSHOPS

Reading and Writing Workshop lend easily to whole group work since the students work independently at their own level. Strategies such as paired reading, journaling, shared reading and peer conferencing become student initiated activities. Other strategies such as mini lessons and teacher conferencing will need more teacher direction.

Daily Read Aloud - Students at all levels enjoy and benefit from hearing the teacher read aloud. Most teachers already include this in the daily schedule; after lunch, before dismissal, etc. Selections do not necessarily need to be limited to the theme but should be of high interest to the class and cover a variety of topics and genres. Listening to good literature read fluently and with expression will help motivate students to improve their own reading skills.

A Word About Assessment - Evaluating and assessing student progress is always important in the learning process. There are, however, a variety of approaches to authentic assessment. Paper and pencil assessment is usually not the most effective form for early learners. The teacher’s own observation and methods of evaluating student learning and mastery are important components of assessment at this level. See the *Assessment* chapter in the *Pathways Teacher Manual* for more information.

MANAGEMENT TIPS

Fitting it all in - Multi-grade teachers have become experts at organizing activities into instructional time and independent work time. The above components have both elements. After direct instruction of the strategies and skills is concluded, previous assignments are reviewed and new assignments given. Assignments not completed during the scheduled language arts block such as independent reading and writing assignments, spelling, handwriting, etc., can be completed throughout the day as time permits.

While first and second grade students will probably need to have teacher instructional time on a daily basis, students in grades three and four may only need to meet every other day with the teacher. This, of course, will depend on the students’ maturity, motivation and ability to work independently.

Integration with Other Content Areas - Many of the themes can be integrated into other content areas such as Bible, science and social studies. For example, *The Cabin Faced West* (Grade 4, Theme #8) easily integrates with westward expansion. *Will We Miss Them?* (Grade 2, Theme #6) flows easily into science topics on endangered species. *The Daily Lesson Guides* include many extension activities to help integrate the **Pathways** themes with other content areas.

DON'T OVERDO IT!

PATHWAYS provides many, many activities from which to choose in each *Daily Lesson Guide*. **Do not try to do them all.** The goal is for students to not only learn to read, but to love reading. Many positive reading experiences will help to accomplish this goal. The assessed target skills for each level are the crucial elements that must be taught. It is essential that the teacher enjoy **Pathways** along with the students.