

## Tips for Teachers of Multi-Grade Classrooms

(Most of these tips apply to the elementary classroom. In most cases multi-grade in the junior/senior high is covered by arranging alternate years of instruction. In the other instances, the tips below may be helpful.)

1. Cut spiral binders off teachers' books and place pages in a ring binder or file folder. Pull out the pages needed for a week or a unit. Put these into the appropriate grade's ring binder (use a different color notebook for each grade). You do not have to carry all of your teacher's editions around/home each night.
2. Don't try to grade everything. Have students check each other's papers. Grade quizzes in class (exchange papers) and record grades immediately.
3. For an absent student record the missing assignments (you or a student can do this) as you go through the day and accumulate any worksheets/handouts, etc. Put in folder or large envelope to send home or to place on student's desk.
4. Alternate groups. Teach one class then they work on seatwork/homework while you teach the other class, etc. Write assignments on the board so that students know what to do. If you write assignments on the board for the day, you may instruct students not to begin their work until after you have taught that subject in order to eliminate the issue of students doing a complete assignment wrong and of being "bored" during the teaching phase.
5. Use a subject planning form. Plan your year (semester) so that you can keep on track. It is better to eliminate some extra assignments or interesting rabbit trails in each unit and keep on track than to finish the end of the year far behind in text books or rushing through the last units.
6. Keep lesson plans (on the computer if possible). Use last year's plans to write this year's. Jot notes ("this was too much for one lesson," etc.) to help with next year's planning.
7. Have activities planned for downtime. Insist that they work on homework and unfinished class work before "playing." Plan review games they can do with each other. Have a reading table, puzzle table, and extra worksheets. Students should have one or two library books at their desks to read. Encourage reading during downtime. A goal can be to read 10 times their grade level in pages every two weeks. Laminate drill pages from math books and laminate spelling lists. Students can use these for drill or to quiz each other. Explain your schedule and when they are allowed to do what.
8. Cycle the curriculum/subjects.
9. Combine subjects/concepts into one lecture. Then give grade-appropriate assignments, or grade-appropriate grading scale/requirements.
10. Develop independent learning. Teach the students to work on their own.
11. Use coded hand signals to minimize interruptions for things such as students needing a tissue or needing to use the restroom or sharpen a pencil.
12. Have older students help younger. Develop their leadership skills. Allow them to lead drills, read Scripture, etc.
13. Define and establish routines.
14. Announce transitions clearly. Start with the grade first so that students know who should be listening to the instruction. E.g. Fourth grade, come to the reading table with your reader, a pencil, and piece of paper.
15. Inspect what you expect. Randomly check those quizzes and papers that you are allowing them to exchange and grade.
16. Teach students to transition QUIETLY so that they do not disturb the other class.

17. Start with the hardest subject first (for younger students this is reading, for older students this is math). This allows you to teach while you both are at your best. It also allows you time later in the day to make adjustments to your schedule as needed in order to finish the other material for the day.
18. While presenting a lesson (math, reading, etc.) watch for students who comprehend and assign them to be a helper for that subject. Teach students how to help without giving answers. Instruct students to get help from today's helper if you are busy with the other class. Allow for quiet talking as students do this. Keep an eye on it while you are instructing the other grade. You will know if students are abusing this privilege.
19. Teach spelling lists by grade level. (This is one subject where parents really perceive that students are at a disadvantage if they are either using the older grade's spelling list (too hard for younger) or younger grade's list (too easy for older). Give the quiz by alternating this way. "Number 1 for 5<sup>th</sup> grade is ..., Number 1 for 6<sup>th</sup> grade is..." Grade for penmanship at the same time.
20. Teach science, history, Bible, and health on an alternating year. Use an easier grading scale for younger students if they are in the older grade's curriculum. (Second graders may memorize longer verses than first graders. You can still drill together but test just for the material required by the specific grade level.) Or use books from both levels each year: Some teachers cover  $\frac{1}{2}$  of lower level text book year 1 in approx.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of year, the  $\frac{1}{2}$  of upper level text book during remaining  $\frac{3}{4}$  of year. Next year cover the second  $\frac{1}{2}$  of lower text book and the second half of upper level text book in the same manner.
21. Between subjects throughout the day take time to answer students' questions.
22. Read a book to the whole class. This builds class rapport and unity. This can be done after lunch for 15 to 20 minutes per day. It is worth the sacrifice of time to have this shared experience.
23. Teach for understanding of the subject rather than for rote memory.
24. In subjects like language arts and math, where it is not possible to alternate years as you can with Bible, science and history, whenever possible give a joint explanation with grade-specific assignments. You may have to take some things out of order, but you can save yourself work in the classroom by spending some preparation/planning time.
25. Limit the amount of time you spend on non-educational issues (e.g. collecting lunch money).
26. Group students by ability rather than by grade when that is advantageous and possible.
27. Find the new normal. Focus on teaching core material.
28. Add little fun activities even if you can't do the big events that you might do with a single-grade class. When possible share the fun activities with both classes.
29. Allow the students to learn from each other. As long as students are completing their own work, it is fine for them to hear what the other class is doing. This is either exposure for the younger class or review for the older class.
30. Work ahead as much as possible with your planning.
31. Begin your day with some drill. Start early in the year with things the students will need to know later. By the time you get to that chapter/unit, they will already know the memorized requirements (states and capitols, presidents of the US in order, identification of states on a map, metric conversion, etc.).
32. When teaching alternate years of subjects try not to teach all of one grade one year and the other grade the next. For example, during the first year teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade science and 6<sup>th</sup> grade history, the second year teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade history and 6<sup>th</sup> grade science. This keeps the students from being as overwhelmed.
33. Assign each student a number to use for keeping things in order. Along with their name, they can put their number on each paper (and be required to turn in their papers in numerical order); put their number on their pencils, textbooks, etc. Lost items can be easily returned.

34. Communicate to parents through a class website.
35. Plan to teach each lesson in half of the time (or less). For example if you would spend 1 hour on math in a single-grade class, spend ½ hour teaching and helping the 1<sup>st</sup> grade before spending a ½ hour teaching and helping the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Since the students will be doing seatwork during the other ½ hour, they are really getting the full dose!
36. Help younger distracted students pay attention by building a ½ wall in your classroom; you can see over it but they cannot. This can be made from short bookshelves or from PVC or metal piping with a curtain. It can be portable so that it can be moved for times when it is not necessary.
37. Keep them busy. Don't allow one class to keep another from learning. Teach them to do their tasks in a disciplined order (schoolwork, seatwork, stations, fun reading, homework).
38. Get a teacher's aide – a high school student, a parent, a college education student. They can be reading buddies for younger students, change bulletin boards, file papers, record homework grades, make photo copies. Adults can supervise recess, lunch, or restroom breaks.
39. List your teaching materials with your lesson plans. Gather them the night (or weekend) before the lesson.
40. Teach students to problem solve before getting help from you or from the student helper. They must (1) pay attention when the lesson is taught, (2) re-read the directions, (3) look for the answer on their page, (4) ask the teacher or student helper. One teacher's rule: "Ask three, then ask me."
41. Require students to turn in complete work (all questions answered, name on page, etc.).
42. Use the same schedule for both classes (Math 3, Math 4, Reading 3, Reading 4, ...)
43. Correct in class as much as possible.
44. Invest \$100 (or your amount) to make posters that can be used for drill, class rules, etc.
45. Drill at the beginning of the day for 15 minutes. (Presidents, metric system, multiplication tables— anything the students will need to know by the end of the year. As you get to this unit they will be prepared. Do the same material with both classes. Your students will know it very well!)
46. Use lunch or recess to help students who are far behind.
47. Merge classes when their material synchs. This will probably be easier at the beginning of the school year. It works better if you are using the same publisher for the same subject, e.g. all language arts from BJ Press, math from ABeka. This can be done with different work (by grade level) for the same concept.
48. Set your class schedule based on the things that cannot be moved (e.g. recess, lunch). Invest uninterrupted time in the hardest subjects. Once your schedule is set, keep an eye on the clock just as high school teachers have to keep up with the bells and dismiss class on time.
49. Let older students help.
50. Use the staggered time instruction/seatwork method when whole-class instruction is not an option.
51. Combine lessons whenever possible. (Prep time is harder, but there is much of this that can be done.) You may have to take some material out of order.
52. Review. This can often be done with more than one class at a time and can be done with games & other activities that add interest to the classroom.
53. Have two separate collection boxes for student work (one per grade level) to ease your sorting. Choose a class color (red for 1<sup>st</sup>, blue for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade) and use this to help with all kinds of organizing (labeling textbooks and teacher's guides, notebook and folder colors, etc.). You can even find colored tape and markers to use for labeling items.

## Tips for Principals in Schools with Multi-Grade Classrooms

1. Provide outside help to free up some of the teacher's time (parent volunteers, students teacher's aides, paid aides [pay scale for aides is lower]). Student helpers can be reading buddies, can tutor younger students, change bulletin boards, tear worksheets out of books, check-in ungraded homework, and make photo copies; adult helpers can collect lunch money, take duties (playground, lunch, recess, restroom).
2. Utilize computer programs for recording & reporting grades. Provide a computer in the classroom.
3. Schedule a volunteer to teach art, P.E., music, etc. Arrange the schedule so that teachers alternate who has recess duty, lunch duty, etc. A few free minutes each day or on alternate days is a huge help.
4. If successful, don't move teacher from one grade level/combination to another. The second year is so much easier than the first.
5. Allow/encourage a teacher to be flexible with her scheduling both of the curriculum cycle and of day schedule. Recognize that the flexible scheduling may adversely affect some standardized or grade-level annual testing scores but that these should even out as the students complete the off-schedule classes. Communicate this to parents/teachers.
6. Schedule courses on a rotating schedule as much as possible. This works particularly well with high school classes.
7. Group students in order to give the teacher fewer preps. In the elementary, combine 4 grades for PE, art, etc. Give these classes to an aide, volunteer, or one teacher. For example the 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher may teach music to all grades on Mondays, but have an hour free on Tuesday while the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher teaches PE to all grades and have Thursday free while all grades have art. On the high school level teach US History this year to all 9-12 and World history next year to all 9-12. The history teacher now has one prep instead of 2, 3 or 4. Even if the class is taught two class periods, it is still one prep. (Students who transfer in can take the class again – different teacher will approach differently, or supplement with ACE or Alpha Omega or other independent work that is supervised and graded.)
8. Provide more prep time than you might provide for teachers of single grades.
9. Move as many staff as possible into the classroom, even if the office must work harder/smarter.
10. Give students more time w/each teacher. Longer periods of time are helpful for the teacher of a combined class. Transitions eat up valuable time.
11. Facilitate communication. Make sure parents know how it works. Provide Parent-Teacher Fellowship program to allow each teacher to explain how she makes this work. In a program have a "sample school day" section of one multi-grade class. Increasing the parents' knowledge of how the class operates is one of the best ways to improve parent attitudes about multi-grade classrooms. (Linley Cornish, p. 137)
12. Provide opportunities for teachers to fellowship, participate in professional development, network.
13. Utilize teachers' God-given skills and training to the fullest. If your 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade teacher is "artsy," maybe she can teach all elementary art in exchange for not having to teach science, etc. This improves use of time and talent and makes for happier teachers.