



**Catholic
Curriculum
Cooperative**

TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

**Strategies for Student Choice
Strategies for Student Ownership
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Cooperative Learning Strategies
Learning Centres
Contracts and Goal Setting
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Teaching and Learning Strategies

“The dream begins with a teacher who believes in you, who tugs and pushes and leads you on to the next plateau, sometimes poking you with a sharp stick called truth.”

Dan Rather

Adapted from *The Combined Grade Classroom Guide*
(Edmonton Board of Education)

Combined grade classes are not unlike any other classes in terms of their composition: all classes have a variety of students with different needs and ability levels. The basic needs of the students do not differ greatly between single and combined grade classes. Equipped with the understanding that all children can learn, nurturing teachers will take students from where they are and will foster the growth of each child. Teaching and learning strategies are the tools and methods used to instruct for achievement of the curriculum expectations. By using these tools, teachers can make teaching a combined grade a positive experience both for themselves and for their students.

The teaching and learning strategies used by teachers of a combined grade classes are similar to those used by teachers of a single-grade classes since there is a diversity of levels of abilities and interests in every class. However, combined grade classrooms may more often require that students work independently or in small groups both within and across the two grades. This means that teaching and learning strategies used in combined grade classes need to specifically address independence and cooperation.

Strategies for Student Choice

Each learner is unique yet the needs of all must be met. In order to give students an opportunity to fully develop their roles in the classroom it becomes crucial for teachers to understand the uniqueness of each child. The teacher is responsible for managing an environment where children find success by learning in a style that is uniquely theirs. When students are given the opportunity for choice they can demonstrate their learning using their most positive learning style or multiple intelligence.

Adapted from *Classroom Management*
Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative
2001

Opportunities for choice come in many forms in the classroom. It is important that teachers of both single and combined grade classes build choice into their classroom organizations, lesson plans and assessment practices.

Students can be given opportunities for choice by being involved in:

- choosing partners for an activity;
- selecting activities, projects, books, etc.;
- determining some of the criteria for grading purposes;
- selecting certain items to include into a portfolio of student work;
- using learning centres for student-directed activities;

- choosing and creating assessment criteria.

Students in a combined grade class can benefit from the choice available through the strategies used to address two grades such as tiered assignments, tiered assessments and student contracts.

Advantages

When students are given choice about the activities in which they participate, they will:

- have increased motivation;
- have an increased sense of satisfaction;
- become more independent learners;
- be able to immerse themselves in worthwhile tasks while the teacher works with another group.

Guidelines

The groups can be changed in size and numbers depending on the assignment.

Sometimes the work is done in cross-grade groups or in grade groups..

Sample Activity

The Discovery Approach is one method of building opportunities for choice into the curriculum. The Discovery Approach involves students in discovering properties, similarities and differences in an experiment or project or in solving a challenge. The students learn to share information and to help other students

Discovering the Properties of Water

The Teacher	The Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepares equipment and assignments beforehand; • explains the content of the lesson, e.g. Today we are going to discuss water. • teaches a directed lesson on water, its uses, its physical properties; • charts things to discover about water, e.g. Does water always stay the same? • directs the students during experiments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are partnered with someone from the other grade in a combined grade class (each grade has their own criteria and experiment); • have a set of the appropriate equipment; • carry out the experiment; • make their own discoveries about water; • write their discoveries, cooperatively, on a sheet of chart paper.

Strategies for Student Ownership

Student ownership is developed when teachers encourage students to become responsible and accountable for themselves and their learning. Teachers continually promote and model the concept that there is not just one teacher in the room. Each student is also a teacher, and everyone learns and helps others learn by working together, sharing ideas and helping to develop each other's knowledge, skills and attitudes. Student ownership is especially important in a combined grade class because all students need to feel responsible for the classroom environment and learning that takes place. Combined grade class teachers need to develop and nurture student desire and ability to take ownership for learning.

Advantages

Student Ownership helps students learn how to:

- become more responsible for their learning and the learning of others;
- work with other students;
- share ideas and knowledge and develop these in others;
- participate in planning learning activities;
- understand how their work is being evaluated;

Guidelines

Teachers can develop student ownership by encouraging students to:

- discuss and respond to learning activities in a variety of ways;
- recognize and appreciate individual differences in abilities, interests and learning styles;
- discuss the points of view of others, e.g., authors, other students,
- complete assignments with open-ended questions that challenge them to the best of their abilities;
- make some choices about the program and independent study projects;
- become involved in establishing classroom routines and rules.

Sample Activities

The following are examples of practices that promote student ownership.

Peer Tutoring

Successful combined grade class teachers capitalize on the capabilities of their students to help one another. With the mix of ability levels and an atmosphere of respect and cooperation, students will help each other to acquire knowledge and skills. It is often necessary to instruct students on the appropriate behaviours associated with peer tutoring. These behaviours include talking positively, proper questioning strategies, giving praise and feedback, and developing clarity.

Some advantages for peer tutoring are:

- teaching or questioning each other during such activities as mathematics and spelling helps strengthen learning;
- helping students to develop a skill that the tutor possesses;
- building the self-confidence of the tutor;
- peer modeling of skills builds leadership and community;
- explaining a concept to one another using "Kid Language" may clarify thinking.

Student Self-Evaluation

It is important to teach and promote the concept of self-evaluation. Students can learn the process of self-evaluation through discussion and modeling. Self-evaluation is especially helpful in a combined grade class classroom to build independence and goal-setting skills. Reflecting upon one's learning needs and strengths allows the student in a combined grade class to determine own progress and growth in the school year.

Students can engage in self-evaluation by:

- using checklists and contracts to assess completion of tasks;
- marking their own activities, with teacher supervision,
- participating in creating rubrics for major tasks;
- completing reflection journals
- monitoring their progress over time;
- viewing 'mistakes' as positive learning experiences that hold powerful lessons for growth

Class Meetings

One characteristic of a classroom that has achieved rich learning experiences is the presence of internalized democratic reasoning between students and teachers. In a democratic classroom, students will see that the classroom community decides how problems will be solved. Students and teachers work together in collaboration to uphold the rights of the individual.

There are many opportunities where students can be involved in the decision making process. When students have a choice in the direction of a project, or are able to choose an activity from a variety of activities, they develop a sense of ownership in the learning.

For class meetings, a code of behaviour should be set. All members of the classroom should come to consensus about a class code of behaviour that is fair, reasonable and expressed in positive language.

Ball Toss

An activity that can engage the whole class of two grades is the ball toss. The teacher tosses an indoor ball or beanbag to an individual student who contributes an idea or answer and tosses it to someone else who contributes an idea or answer. The ball continues to be tossed until the end of the discussion. This activity keeps students in both grades ready to participate and to contribute as appropriate to own level of ability. The ball toss encourages cross-grade interactions.

Think, Pair, Share

The "Think, Pair, Share" activity can be used within a grade or across two grades. The activity consists of the following steps:

- each student thinks about the question or challenge individually;
- students share ideas with a partner;
- the partners plan a response to share with the whole class;
- partners share their ideas with the whole class.

This format provides the opportunity for students from both grades to share their ideas and take ownership for class discussions.

Grouping Strategies

Teachers may group students in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. Groupings are intended to be flexible and temporary. In every situation where groups are formed, teachers give clear directions for independent group work and precede the group work with the teaching of the necessary concepts or skills to be used in small group follow-up activities.

Advantages of Group Work

Combined grade class teachers find that group work has many advantages. A variety of groupings allows for:

- clarifying tasks and procedures;
- determining individual roles to contribute to the success of the group;
- organizing and coordinating skill development;
- sustaining workable leadership and contributor roles;
- motivating and advising each contributor;
- synthesizing the work of individuals into a coherent whole;
- resolving group difficulties diplomatically;
- sharing critiques or recognition of quality work.

Guidelines for Developing Student Groups

Teachers designing group activities can use the following guidelines (based on the acronym BUILD). Combined grade classes especially benefit from small group activities to develop bonds and to help students be responsible for both individual and group accomplishments.

- B** Build in higher-order thinking so that students are challenged to think deeply and to transfer subject matter;
- U** Unite the class so students form bonds of trust, which enable teamwork;
- I** Individual Learning: Each student is accountable to master all skills and knowledge. The groups are a means to facilitate mastery before the teacher checks each individual through quizzes, tests, essays, or other more authentic assessment strategies;
- L** Look back and debrief what and how each student learned. Teach students to identify and assess their thinking, feelings, and social skills, so that the responsibility for learning shifts from the teacher to the student.
- D** Develop students' social skills. By providing explicit training in the social skills, teachers helps students master cooperative abilities during cooperative work.

Grouping Strategies

The following grouping strategies reflect some possible ways that students can be grouped:

Grade Level Groups

In combined grade classes, teachers will frequently work with grade level groups, where all the students from one grade are grouped for instruction. This grouping is associated with Planning Option A.

Whole Class Groups

At times the both grades will participate in the same lesson. This works best when using Planning Options C, D, or E since both grades are addressed as one group, in most of the activities associated with these planning options.

Cross-Class Groups

If a school has two or more classrooms with the same grades, the teachers may at times decide to combine the students from the same grade in groups to attempt to form homogeneous groups. The teacher may need to utilize this grouping for instructions in the Sacraments or other purposes such as the Grades 3 and 6 EQAO testing. In other cases, teachers may group students of the same grade temporarily to re-establish friendships or to teach common concepts for that grade. For example, two teachers of combined Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten classes may have a common activity time in order that same-age peers from both classes may interact. Planning Option B depends on the opportunity to group students from the same grade but from different classrooms for instruction.

Paired Groups

Teachers may encourage students to form pairs or assign students in pairs for a given task. Sometimes students of various achievement levels are paired together. Students from two grades could be paired to encourage peer relationships and to stimulate each other's cognitive growth. The pairs are sometimes more effective groups than small groups. Paired groups can be used for peer evaluation, shared reading, study partners, reader/ actor roles, etc. In this way students share decisions concerning responsibility and roles using their complementary skills.

Individual Work

Teachers should incorporate much independent, individual work into programs to allow students to work at their own pace and to demonstrate individual strengths, needs or interests. Time should be allowed for personal reflection and personal choice. When involved in individual work, the student can progress at his own pace. Teachers often use contracts or student education plans to formalize the expectations of each student and to monitor progress and accomplishment of previously established tasks and timelines.

Ability Groups

Teachers may group some students from each the two grades who are at the same level of achievement. For example, the students in one guided reading group could be working at the same level; or in mathematics, students may be grouped together to work on the same concept such as multiplication. Teachers are to be cognizant that sustained ability groups could negatively influence the self-esteem of the lower ability group members and groups should be changed frequently.

Base/Home Groups

Base or Home Groups is one way of organizing the class into heterogeneous groups which will be in place for an extended period of time such as a week or month. These groups are extremely useful and beneficial to both teachers and students. They serve a range of functions, from students helping each other complete work they missed as a result of absence from school, in-class peer tutoring, to after school studying.

The class is divided into a number of groups (usually 5 or 6) with an equal number of students in each group. The members of the group are of mixed ability, both genders, a mixture of leaders and followers, and a mixture of behavioural abilities. Over the year, the process of selecting who goes in which group would change, e.g., the teacher may assign groupings; students could choose partners and the teacher groups the partners or the students could choose who will be the members of their group.

Creating home groups is a convenient way of assembling children quickly for the following purposes:

- classroom helpers/managers, e.g., one group is responsible for all tasks for a week;
- activities such as drama or games;
- physical education squads and teams;
- cooperative learning activities, e.g., group discussions, jigsaw activities, problem solving;
- assigning seats — each group works at one table or grouping of desks;
- teacher-directed lessons when teachers want to work with a mixed-ability group.

Interest Groups

Teachers may form interest groups based on common topics of interest. The students in each group may agree to investigate a problem or research a subject. The interest group may focus on a project and be motivated to produce a product such as a report or a presentation. Again, the members, while working on the same project, may be from different grades and different achievement levels .

Cooperative Learning Groups

In cooperative learning groups, the whole group works together to accomplish a single task or objective. Each member of the group has an assigned role or responsibility to carry out during the discussions or task completion. Students may be placed in cooperative learning groups randomly or based on achievement, interest or strengths. The students assigned to each group usually complement each other.

Learning Styles Groups

The learning style of students in a combined grade class can be determined using a variety of demonstrations and tools. After the teacher and students have a good understanding of various learning styles, students are placed into groups such as visual, auditory and tactile/kinesthetic groupings. These groups can be composed of students from both grades. Each group can be given an assignment that reflects their learning style. For example:

- visual learning style group could use pictures, videos, charts, diagrams to complete an assignment;
- auditory learning style group could use dialogue, oral, lectures, tapes to complete an assignment;
- tactile learning style group could use hands on activities and manipulatives to complete an assignment.

Random Groups

Students are grouped indiscriminately by self-selection, birthday month, likes, etc. Groupings can be formed with students from both grades when abilities or common interests are not the focus for learning. Random groupings may be used in physical education classes, in art activities or for special events such as class trips.

Cooperative Learning Strategies

Cooperative learning is a way to structure the class and instruction so that students work together in small groups to achieve a single goal. The key to success of cooperative learning is the interdependence and mutual support that is developed among the group members as they work together over an extended period of time. In this way, the power of peer relationships is used as a motivator for both academic and social development.

The structure of a combined grade class is particularly suited to cooperative learning activities as the range of student needs is broadened in a combined grade class. Therefore, the children can be organized for learning in a very meaningful, heterogeneous way. Teachers may capitalize upon this unique attribute of combined grade classes by encouraging the older students to model for the younger ones. If a learning task involves children working together instead of individually or competitively, fruitful collaboration between “novices” and “experts” can occur.

Cooperative Learning emphasizes:

Positive Interdependence

- common and shared goals;
- group rewards;
- “sink or swim together”.

Individual Accountability

- learn and understand material;
- signature required (accountability to defend product);
- separate assessments and evaluation.

Face to Face Interaction

- verbal exchange and dialogue;
- summarizing;
- teaching;
- reinforcing

Social Skills

- social skills are introduced/taught;
- cooperative skills (e.g., helping a classmate, encouraging) are reinforced.

Group Processing

- students analyze how well they work together i.e., what worked and what would help next time;
- teacher can observe;
- students observe themselves and others (reflection tool).

Both curriculum content and social skills to facilitate group cooperation are learned as each student is accountable for her individual effort, as well as for the success of all group members. Through cooperative learning, students work together to accomplish shared goals thus creating a classroom community of learners and promoting the self-esteem of all students.

Guidelines

The students will need opportunities to practice participating in Cooperative Learning groups. Some students may have had little or no experience in working with other students to achieve a common goal.

Short, simple group activities or tasks should be given in September until the students get used to working in groups and with each other so the students can begin to understand the roles of group members.

A defined team goal and individual accountability must be built into every task that the teams are assigned. A rubric should identify the curriculum expectations, define the required components and the evaluation criteria for the task.

If a culminating task, which contributes towards a student's final mark, is used for a cooperative learning group activity, it will be necessary for teachers to make sure that there are enough individual components included in the task so that each member can receive an individual mark on the member's work well as a group mark which would be based on how the member contributed to the group goal.

The task needs to have enough scope to allow for various roles within the activity i.e. leader, recorder, reporter, collector, timekeeper. The members need to be reminded that they need to participate in the activity while maintaining their roles, e.g., the timekeeper contributes to the activity with one eye on the clock.

Roles of Members of a Cooperative Learning Group

The curriculum offers many opportunities for students to work in groups. However, if the students are not accustomed to working in groups, teachers should consider structuring the process by assigning some or all of the group members roles. It is necessary to explain the responsibilities and have students practice each role.

The following roles are frequently used in cooperative learning groups:

- **Leader:** keeps the group on track and makes sure the work gets completed, encourages group members to work together;
- **Recorder:** writes down the group's ideas and decisions;
- **Reporter:** shares the group's ideas and decisions with other groups or the class;
- **Collector:** gathers supplies needed by the class;
- **Timekeeper:** reminds the group about the time they have used, how much is left, and how the group is keeping to the project's timeline.

Samples

For examples of Cooperative Learning activities, teachers are referred to the Ministry Elementary Curriculum Units at the planner website: www.ocup.org The culminating tasks are often Cooperative Learning activities.

Learning Centres

Learning centres are specifically assigned spaces where activities are provided that promote exploration and interaction with other students. Rotation through the various activities allows students to actively explore areas of interest in greater depth. Learning centres can be designed for both independent and cooperative learning and can be permanent (e.g., such as listening, reading, science, painting, or music centres) or temporary (e.g., related to specific topics or curriculum areas). Centres can be set up in the classroom, the school library information centre, and other areas of the school.

Well-designed learning centres:

- actively engage students in learning through the use of open-ended activities or manipulatives.
- enhance student motivation by providing a group of students with choices about meaningful, independent work while the teacher is working with another group of students.
- can help students to develop interpersonal skills and independent work habits.

Since the success of a combined grade classes is dependent on having students working independently, learning centres should be a fundamental teaching strategy of such classes.

Guidelines for creating learning centres:

Learning centres:

- require organization of time, materials, and resources;
- require monitoring of student choices and tracking of completion of activities;
- promote choice, but require structure in determining the choices available;
- require clear communication of the expected results;
- work best if the task is specific.

The teacher:

- establishes a purpose for the learning at the centres;
- arranges the learning environment and organizes for individual differences in interest and ability, including different learning and presentation styles;
- collaborates (e.g., with the teacher-librarian, special education teacher) to provide appropriate and varied resources and materials that address a variety of learning levels and styles;
- establishes, with students, the expectations for learning and for routines at the centres;
- pre-teaches skills and process, if required, for the intended results;
- provides structure in the planning of the learning activities and for the choices available;
- establishes how the learning will be recorded (e.g., graphs, checklists).

Types of Learning Centres

Student-Created Learning Centres

When students are involved in the creation of a learning centre, either by contributing ideas about content and design or by contributing resources, they will more likely participate more actively in the assignments at the centres.

Some considerations for student-created learning centres are:

- students hold a major responsibility for getting the centre up and running;
- students should have had experience with research or independent work;
- students need to determine criteria for purpose of the centre, content and display;
- students need to be involved in the criteria for assessment of learning;
- a variety of multimedia selections and arrangements are provided to accommodate varied learning styles;
- students are provided with opportunities for peer recognition of efforts across the grades;
- students need to see the value of their work;
- students from the lower grade may have less responsibility for the maintenance of the centres, as appropriate.

Teacher-Created Learning Centres

When teachers create learning centres, they determine the purpose and structures the activities and the assessment of learning.

Some considerations for teacher-created learning centres are:

- resources can be gathered to highlight a particular learning process common to both grades (e.g., critical thinking, research skill development or creative problem solving);
- learning can be expressed in a variety of ways (e.g., art, sculpture, music, dance);
- students need hands-on experiences with various materials to deepen exploration and expand the types of products that can be created;
- opportunities should be provided to reflect on ideas independently and to express ideas in various media forms;
- students should be challenged to create solutions independently and in cross-grade level groups.

Establishing Routines for Learning Centres

Teachers need to provide clear direction for the participation in and maintenance of the learning centres. Since teachers of combined grade classes may be working with one group while another is engaged at the centres, the centres need to be well organized.

Guidelines about how to participate at the learning centres can be cooperatively created and should include:

- how to move to the learning centre and obtain resources required to complete the task;
- rules for talking with peers;
- clear written instructions about expectations for task completion;

- clear written criteria about assessment of the task;
- how to ask for and give assistance;
- clear written timelines, as appropriate to each grade;
- large assignments should be chunked into practical components;
- what to do when task is completed (e.g., where to hand it in, what to do until the teacher is ready to work with your group).

Learning centres need to be maintained on a regular basis. Strategies for maintenance should include:

- assigning pairs of students across the grades to maintain each centre;
- clear instructions about how to clean up when finished working at a centre;
- regular teacher supervision of centres.

When designing activities to be completed independently at the centres, teachers need to:

- make sure the task is open-ended enough to allow for a variety of responses;
- carefully structure and sequence the learning during the task completion;
- clearly define criteria for completion and assessment of the task;
- develop complementary extensions for students who can manage them;
- provide checklists to help students pace the completion of the assignment;
- allow for practice and reinforcement of the skill;
- adapt the task for individualized learning as required;
- adapt each task according to grade-level expectations.

Learning Centres in Combined Grade Classes

Learning centres in a combined grade class can:

- allow teachers to address grade-specific expectations by creating appropriate assignments and by placing appropriate resources at the centre as related to the curriculum for each grade;
- allow the students to complete activities at their maximum potential in a self-directed manner.

Contracts, Goal Setting and Independent Study

A contract is a negotiated plan, created by a teacher and a student or group of students, that outlines the components of a task to be completed by the student and the timelines for each stage of the completion. Goal Setting, either by individuals or groups, can be included in a contract. Independent study allows a student to plan, explore, organize, and communicate a topic of interest independently and in more detail.

Contracts, goals and independent study projects can:

- be designed to address the needs of each single grade in a combined grade class;
- give the students a role and responsibility in shaping a task;
- encourage students to work at their own level of ability.

These strategies are valuable in a combined grade class because they can be used to tailor a single task to the appropriate level of achievement for each student or for a group of students.

Contracts

Contracts are most effective when designed cooperatively by students and teachers. Creating a contract cooperatively lets the students:

- consider each component of the task to be completed;
- clarify any misunderstandings or concerns about aspects of the task;
- become familiar with the timeline for completion of each component of the task;
- participate in the development of personalized, adapted components of the task;
- understand the expectations to be achieved and the criteria for assessment;
- use conferencing with the teacher to discuss content and process;
- demonstrate organization skills and motivation;
- take more ownership for the contract and perhaps increase commitment;
- self-assess work habits and achievement of the expectations.

Goal Setting

Goal setting has been proven to motivate and direct behaviour. Goal setting can be used to:

- develop independent, self directed learners;
- actively empower and involve students in their own learning;
- perpetuate and enhance student esteem;
- provide feedback for students, parents and teachers;
- give opportunities to reflect and self-assess achievement and progress;
- increase student motivation.

One way of creating effective goals to help students achieve a range of expectations to the best of their abilities is to use the acronym SMART.

The goals should be:

- S** – specific,
- M** – measurable,
- A** – achievable,
- R** – realistic, and
- T** – time specific.

Goals need to be described in clear, sequential, manageable steps rather than in unclear, large statements. Teachers will need to model, teach and practice goal setting with the students over a period

of time before the students will be able to independently set and assess goals.

Independent Study

Independent study allows a student to plan, explore, organize, and communicate a topic of interest independently and in more detail. An independent study project/program can be related to a topic/issue in the class curriculum or it can be an alternative task based on a student's needs and learning style.

An independent study program for a student could include:

- opportunities to pursue personal interests in depth;
- extensions for personal interest and knowledge;
- choice for inclusion of school and community resources;
- opportunities to use library resources.

Independent study can offer students personal satisfaction through self-initiated learning and sharing.

Reflecting on the Goal-setting Process

Individual Reflections:

Teachers need to provide students with regularly scheduled times to independently and individually review and reflect on their goals.

Some questions that a student might ask regarding goals and plans are:

- Are my goals realistic? Why or why not?
- Do I need to modify them to make them more achievable?
- How is my plan working? Why?
- Did I follow my plan? Why or why not?
- What will I continue to do or what will I change in my plan to help me achieve my goals?
- Are the steps I will take to reach my goal clear and in small, achievable chunks?
- Will I continue to work on this goal? Why or why not?
- How am I feeling about this goal?

Group Reflections:

Similarly, class or group goals should be reviewed periodically.

Some questions that students might ask themselves are:

- Was our group goal accomplished?
- How do we feel about the result of the group goal?
- Did we follow through with our plan?
- What worked? What didn't work?
- What would we do the same next time? Why?
- What would we do differently next time? Why?
- How did we each contribute to the group goal?
- Were our individual goals accomplished?
- How were our goals related to curriculum expectations for each grade?

Tiered Assignments and Differentiated Instruction

A tiered assignment has several components of varying levels of difficulty. Students will be directed to complete the appropriate components based on ability and learning style. Differentiated instruction refers to a strategy that involves using a different teaching strategy to teach similar concepts to various groups of students.

In a combined grade class, tiered assignments and differentiated instruction are very useful ways of teaching broad concepts or a continuum of skills. Tiered assignments can accommodate for the different levels and abilities in a combined grade class as the teacher ‘tiers’ or strategies for each grade, the expectations of whole-class lessons, learning centre tasks, or culminating tasks.

Tiered Assignments:

Tiered Lessons

When a teacher is planning and teaching a tiered lesson, several stages of the lesson will be directed at the larger group while some stages will be directed at students who need review or students who need extensions of the skill or topic. For example, the teacher may be teaching the same concept (paragraph structure) to the whole class but adapting parts of the lesson to meet specific expectations appropriate to each grade.

Tiered Learning Centre Tasks

When learning centre tasks are tiered, they have the same basic assignments but may have specific components directed at the higher grade. These components are clearly marked so that each grade knows if they have to complete them with certain criteria, within a specific time period.

Tiered Culminating Tasks

A single, tiered culminating task may be assigned to the whole class but the assessment is based on grade-appropriate expectations. At times, the task itself may be tiered to meet specific grade-level expectations (e.g., both grades may be assigned to research a topic and write a report but the higher grade may need to also do an oral presentation).

Differentiated Instruction:

In a combined grade class, the teacher may differentiate the instruction for a grade or a group of students depending on the amount of direction and support required. Following are some examples of differentiated instruction activities that can be used in a combined grade class:

Differentiated Problem-Solving

The teacher can present the same mathematics problem to both grades and then assist the students in the lower grade to apply problem-solving strategies one at a time while the students in the higher grade solve the problem independently. Also, the students in the lower grade may receive more teacher direction to solve the same problem.

Differentiated Writing Activities

The same writing task (e.g. writing a report) can be assigned to both grades and the students in the lower grade are given a checklist to help them complete the task. In other cases, students may be asked to complete a writing assignment that is similar in genre (e.g., report writing) but may be related to different curriculum topics.

Games and Self-Correcting Activities

Games are an excellent vehicle for reinforcing skills and concepts. Games and self-correcting activities engage individuals or small groups of students in motivating learning experiences without direct teaching. By using games and self-correcting activities, the teacher of a combined grade class has an opportunity to work with one grade or group while the other is purposefully involved in a game that is related to the curriculum expectations.

Commercial and Teacher Created Games

Games may be commercially produced or teacher created. Games that allow a small group to work independently are best suited to a combined grade class classroom. Examples of commercial games are Word Bingo, Scrabble, Snakes and Ladders, Monopoly, etc. Teachers may create similar versions of these games or may design activities that are related to the curriculum such as Medieval Bingo, Pioneer Monopoly, or Rocks and Minerals Matching Games.

Self-Correcting Activities

There are various activities that can be used to both teach and reinforce concepts and knowledge. These activities are designed to provide the student with the correct answer after the student has attempted to answer the question or perform the task.

Examples of these self-reinforcing or self-correcting activities are:

- **Matching Cards:** These cards are designed to have the question and answer match on cards that fit together like a puzzle.
- **Clothespin Answers:** This game includes a large card with a series of questions and colour-coded clothespins with one or two word answers to match with the questions. The clothespins match a colour pattern on the back of the card.
- **Wraps:** These cards have questions and answers on either side of a long strip of notched cardboard. The student must wrap a strip around the card from the question to the answer. The matches can be checked using the back patterns.
- **Electrical Match:** A board with connecting wires allows small bulbs to light when correct matches have been made between questions and answers. Design the board so that the questions and answers can be changed depending on topic or skill. Thus the board could be used all year.
- **Question & Answer Cards:** The answers and questions are provided on cards and the students can self-correct or peer-correct in games.

Self-correcting activities are very useful for review of content knowledge and for reinforcement of concepts and skills that have been taught in previous lessons.

Challenges and Investigations

Challenges and investigations in a combined grade class can be assigned to either grade-specific groups or cross-grade groupings. Challenges and investigations are stimulating and motivating due to the nature of the activities and they can usually be solved in a variety of ways and with different approaches.

Challenges

A challenge activity is an instructional strategy that is especially appropriate in a combined grade class is to teach scientific concepts and skills. In a challenge, students are asked to complete a certain task with specific materials within a given period of time.

The challenge in a combined grade class classroom needs to address expectations that are common to each grade and also allow for the learning of new concepts specific to each grade. Teachers can refer to the CCC units, ECUP units and publishers' programs for challenge activities.

Investigations

Investigations can be done in various subject areas and usually involve research and experimentation. The students and teacher together may decide on the topics of the investigation or the teacher may assign the investigation based on the grade, abilities or interest of the students. The investigation may be a research project or may involve actual surveys and other information gathering.

Some investigations may be related to cross-grade skills such as inquiry, problem-solving, communication and application.

An example of an investigation in a grade 3/4 class might be to: "Determine how the family life, food and habitats of people in Pioneer Times and people in Medieval Times were similar and different".