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The
Manitoba
Teachers'
Society

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Spring 2010 Newsletter

Message from the Chair:

Wow! The year is quickly drawing to a close but our Executive is busy planning the upcoming SAG Conference next fall. We are excited to be hosting Sandra Stone, author of Creating Multiage Classrooms, and The Multi-age Classroom: A Guide for Parents. Sandra will be our keynote speaker and will run a full morning session for all participants. Her afternoon breakout session will focus on Math. We also have the pleasure of having many talented Manitoba teachers who will offer afternoon sessions on Literacy, Math, ICT and Curriculum Planning for the multiage classroom. We hope to see you all there.



Sandra Stone

We are excited to share the possibility of bringing our Keynote presenter, Dr. Sandra Stone, out to our rural members and fellow multi-age colleagues via video conference for our SAG Conference. We are currently working with Manitoba Education, MERLIN, Louis Riel School Division technology staff (and Park West School Division technology staff to find the best technologies possible to bring this session to as many multi-age teachers as possible. Check out our website and the MTS SAG Conference Brochure this summer for more information.

Another exciting development is the launch of our PD Fund. MAME has made funds available to our members for assistance with Professional Development opportunities and Special Project Grants. See our Website <http://multiagemanitoba.org> to access the PD Fund Application form.

Finally, on behalf of Kathy Klenk and myself, I would like to thank our Executive Members for an excellent year. Your dedication and hard work is appreciated more that we can express. It has been a pleasure working with all of you again this year and we look forward to another busy year and a successful conference.

Just a reminder to our membership that our MAME AGM will be on May 19th at 4:30 at the Star Conservatory Restaurant in Assiniboine Park. Please RSVP to Lynn.White@lrsd.net if you are able to attend.

Lynn White

Co-Chair, Manitoba Association of Multi-age Educators.

Events and Activities:

- MAME Annual General Meeting, May 19, 2009, 4:30 at The Star Conservatory.
- MAME SAG Conference, October 22, 2010 at H. S. Paul School. Sharon Stone, who will present on multi-age education, will be our keynote presenter.
- If you are interested in becoming a member of MAME, please contact Ange Neufeld, ange.neufeld@lrsd.net

Book Review

Practical ideas for multi-age education...

Differentiating Literacy Centres: 85+ Leveled Activities...

By Margo Southall

This Early Years' (K - 3) teaching resource book was published as a result of the author and her literacy team's questioning, "How much time do students spend actually engaged in reading and writing at the literacy centers while they work with a group?" A further investigation through careful observation showed that many of her students were having trouble managing their time and completing meaningful activities.

Determined to tier her activities for her literacy centers the author planned and prepared multileveled activities to match the literacy skills she was teaching. This book is a culmination of her quest to help students develop a better understanding of using literacy centers that help children complete their activities and build skills in comprehension, fluency, and word study.

The book contains six chapters organized to lead the reader through the introduction, the planning process, organizing and managing the centers, then differentiated learning at comprehension, fluency, and word study centers. Dozens of ready-to use activities at three levels of challenge are included. These have been created so that you will have materials to help children work successfully on their own.

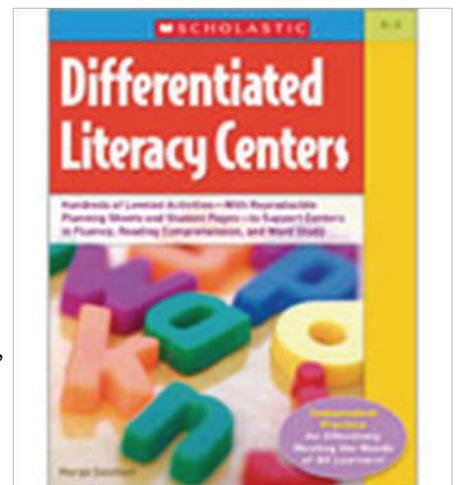
Southall has covered many details to help you develop successful Early Years' differentiated literacy centers to foster independent practice for effectively meeting the needs of all of your learners.

Reviewed by:

Angela Tascona

Resource Teacher

Morris School



—Bibliography—

Southall, Margo. Differentiated Literacy Centers: 85+ Leveled activities with reproducible planning sheets and student pages to support centers in fluency, reading comprehension, and word study. New York: Scholastic, 2007.



The Manitoba Association of Multi-age Educations would like to thank our colleagues for taking the time to share their research, philosophies, reflections, professional reading recommendations, and classroom experiences! If you would like to contribute to the MAME newsletter please forward submissions to: Hilary Carey at Hilary.Carey@lrsd.net

From Theory to Practice: Incorporating Tiering as a Grouping Strategy

By Georgette Nairn, Stephanie Timmerman and Richard P. Hechter, University of Manitoba

The past two years have provided us with the opportunity to experience three different multi-age classrooms between the two of us. As student teachers our practicum was the first time we were exposed to the philosophies and realities of the multi-age classroom. At first we felt over-whelmed; *how could we possibly teach curriculum spanning two or three grades to one class? How could we make sure that all of our students were engaged and understanding the concepts we covered? Where would we find materials to support our students' learning given the different grade levels?* These are questions that a teacher in any classroom may ask, however in a multi-age classroom this becomes more of a challenge due to the more extensive range of students and their varied experiences and understandings.

As we became more comfortable in our classrooms, the philosophies behind the creation of multi-age classrooms resonated with us. We began consulting the literature regarding the intricate dynamics of multi-age teaching and learning to become better versed in this area of pedagogy. Our interest in this area became the foundation from which a presentation at the Western Canadian Association of Student Teachers (WestCAST) conference was developed. In developing our presentation we found that the area that interested us most was the idea of how to group students. More specifically we wanted to focus on differentiating our instruction by creating multiple exits and entrances to meet the needs of all of our students. We developed a series of three lessons for our research that focused on Cluster 2 of the grade 3 science curriculum; Materials and Structures.



The research suggests that this way of grouping could also allow students who were experiencing stress in trying to keep up with their peers, to experience the concepts at a comfortable level.

The experiences in our classrooms showed us that teachers were grouping students in a variety of ways in order to meet the needs of, and to challenge all of the students. One grouping method that caught our attention was creating parallel tasks for a single concept that allowed support for the students that needed it without holding back those that were ready for the next step. This type of grouping was being referred to the co-operating teacher as multiple entry and multiple exit points. This is where we decided to focus our research. Within the research we discovered that the terms “multiple entry and multiple exit points” were referred to in Differentiated Instruction publications (for example Tomlinson, 1999) as a strategy for incorporating the multiple intelligences into instruction. While the terminology was right, the definition did not reflect the classroom constructed concept we were interested in. We began to wonder *is*

this a concept that is being used in the classroom, but is not reflected in the literature? We were considering shifting the direction of our research entirely when we found an excerpt in a book by Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999), a renowned authority on differentiated instruction, which provided us with the terminology required to explore our concept.

“Tiered activities are very important when a teacher wants to ensure that students with different learning needs work with the same essential ideas and use the same key skills. For example a student who struggles with reading or has a difficult time with abstract thinking nonetheless needs to make sense of the pivotal concepts and principles in a given story. Simultaneously, a student who is advanced well beyond the grade expectations in that same subject needs to find genuine challenge in working with the same concepts and principles. A “one-size-first-all” activity is unlikely to help a struggling or grade-level learner come to own important ideas. And it won’t extend the understanding of a student with great knowledge and skill in the same area”.

(Tomlinson, 1999, p. 83).

The umbrella of tiering provided the context for our concept. Further research revealed that the idea of tiering was initially discussed as a way of including students who were achieving beyond grade level into classroom activities. The research suggests that this way of grouping could also allow students who were experiencing stress in trying to keep up with their peers to experience the concepts at a comfortable level. This was another way of allowing students to work through concepts at their own pace while challenging those that needed more stimulation.

The Plan

We explored the idea of tiering theoretically by developing a series of three lessons to explore this concept. Using materials and structures as our curricular outcome, we first tiered students based on their ability to concretely or abstractly think about the world around them to make predictions about which material they thought would be the strongest. This was our exploration of tiering based on cognitive development. All students would be asked to make predictions based on their hands-on classroom experiences. Those students who would be placed in the abstract tier would be asked to extend their prediction using their prior knowledge about the materials. Our second lesson focused on the use of

From Theory into Practice, *Continued*

an experiment to determine the strength of various materials. For this lesson the students would be placed in mixed ability groups so that students at different stages of understanding could come together and learn from each other. This idea incorporates the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) which is relevant and prevalent in a multi-age classroom.

Our final lesson focused on tiering, though the tiering this time was not based on the students' cognitive abilities. Instead the focus was on the students' ability to work independently and effectively within a small group setting. We planned to divide the students into three tiered groups, the first being students who would be identified as able to work in a small group with minimal teacher support. The second tier would be made up of students who could work well in small groups once some teacher guidance had been given. The third tier would consist of students who did not have a lot or any experience working in small groups and who tended to rely heavily on their more experienced and independent peers. This third tier would require the majority of the teacher's attention. Students would be placed in the various groups based on the teacher's knowledge of their past performance and the teacher's observations as to how the students worked within their mixed ability groups from the prior experiment. It is important to note that students were never referred to as tier one, two or three, rather placed in their predetermined groups by the teacher.

The third lesson focused on determining the different ways to strengthen paper by changing its shape or thickness. We broke the lesson up into two days, with the first day being a time for brainstorming all the different ways we could manipulate the paper. The second day would be testing these methods to find out which changes created the strongest paper bridge. One of the reasons we divided the students into three different tiers was to allow the second tier to move between working with the third tier students on the first day when the brainstorming occurred (teacher supported), and then moving into working more independently (like the first tier students on the second day). The focus of the teacher would be to support the tier three learners during the experiment, but once they were at a point where they could work semi-independently, the teacher would be able to circulate and observe the other groups.

Putting the Theory into Practice

After presenting our ideas at the WestCAST conference in Lethbridge, Alberta, we had the opportunity to teach the three lessons we had collaborated on in our respective practicum classrooms.

Stephanie's Experience

I was able to teach the series of materials and structures science lessons in my multi-age 1, 2, 3 classroom. Lesson 1 went as planned using the two tiers (abstract thinkers, concrete thinkers) and I was able to accurately place the students into each tier based on my observations and interactions with the students and my collaborating teacher over the course of the year. I also found that the students worked well in the mixed ability groups of lesson 2, although I noticed that there were not any "leaders" emerging and all of the students looked to the teacher (or EA) who was super-

vising each group for support and direction. This led me to modify the third lesson; I knew that I would not be able to have a tier 1 group who would be able to brainstorm independently and effectively.



Lesson 3 began with a whole class discussion as to how we could alter the paper to make it stronger (i.e. support more pennies). The students were, at first, unable to provide any ideas as to how they could change the paper, even after I had modeled a way to change the thickness and a way to change the shape. I understood that in order for the lesson to move forward I would need to continue to prompt the students by further altering the paper in front of their eyes. As the students' understandings became clearer, there were a few students who were able to provide alternate ideas. This lesson allowed me to come to the conclusion that I would not be able to work with three tiers for the actual experiment planned for the following day. I knew that I needed to change the plan.

Day 2 was built around homogeneous pairs, with each pair working together to test some of the different ideas about changing the paper. The class was divided into two tiers; tier two students who would need minimal support for their learning and tier three students who would need a lot of support in order to be successful. I had the pairs prearranged and I knew which groups were going to be provided with teacher assistance (I had the three EA's in the room each take a group) and which pairs would be able to be primarily independent. I instantly determined that I had made the right decision in altering the arrangement of groups. The tier two students were able to work independently, for the most part, but they did still need some guidance. The tier three students needed a lot of support and most of them would not have been able to move through the experiment without it. We finished the lesson with a whole class discussion as to which method of strengthening the paper was the most effective. This conversation enabled me to notice that there were leaders emerging. These students were all from the tier two groups and they were the students that were able to not only tell what they did, but explain why they think that that method of strengthening was the most effective. These students would become my future tier ones.

From Theory into Practice, *Continued*

Georgette's Experience

The first two lessons went very well. After some discussion with my cooperating teacher I altered the tiering of the first lesson slightly. Rather than pre-dividing the students into those I wanted to extend the prediction by thinking abstractly and those I wanted to focus on using concrete information to form their prediction, I spoke with the whole class about both parts of the prediction and used the abstract tiered task as a challenge or extension that all students had the choice to complete. Given that this was my first opportunity to really explore where my students' thinking was (abstract or concrete), this was a valuable experience and informed my future decisions about groupings that focused on concrete and abstract thinking.

My students had many prior experiences working in small groups, so the mixed-ability groups used in lesson two were not new to them. They enjoyed trying to break the various materials using pennies for weights and there were some interesting and varied results from the different groups. As Stephanie mentioned above, I also found that seeing the students work in mixed ability groups during this lesson helped me see which students were the leaders of their groups. It allowed me to see which students sat back and did not participate, knowing that their peers would get it done.

The third lesson was the most interesting to experience and I learned much about tiering from it. On the first day, after explaining what I wanted them to brainstorm, my tier one students were sent off in groups, writing their ideas on sticky notes and placing them on a piece of blank chart paper I had titled "The Parking Lot". I explained to my students that this was a place for them to "park" their ideas, which served two purposes. The first was that it gave us a quick way to record a variety of ideas about how to change the paper, which could be used in the experiment the following day. The second purpose of the parking lot, was to give myself the opportunity to assess the ideas of the students in tier ones as I would be primarily focusing on the other students during this part of the lesson. Students in tier one were asked to write their name on each sticky note and I challenged them to come up with as many different ideas as possible. Once tier one was on their own, that left me with fourteen students from tier two and three to work with. I have to admit that at first I felt a little overwhelmed having my higher needs students all together without the balance of those that could work independently. I asked the students that remained with me to give me examples of how they could strengthen the paper. Once the students in tier two showed that they understood how to brainstorm, they were sent to work in their independent tier two groups to continue the rest of this activity on their own. I also asked them to add their ideas to our "Parking Lot". This left me with eight students that I could help by recording their ideas. My tier three students also added their ideas to the "Parking Lot" so that by the end of the session the chart paper was covered with ideas.

The next day when we started the experiment, I showed the steps to the class as a whole, and then divided them into their tiered groups from the day before. The eight students in the third tier were divided into two groups, allowing my co-operating teacher and I to each work with a group. Working with my small

group of students who individually were most often the quiet ones in their mixed-ability groups was very revealing. Suddenly these students did not have a leader in their group that they could rely on, so some of the students stepped up into that roll. Having the majority of the class working independently on the experiment also allowed me to focus on encouraging the students in the third tier to work together and to participate more fully. We came back as a class at the end of the experiment and it was evident that all the groups had worked well regardless of which tier they had been in.

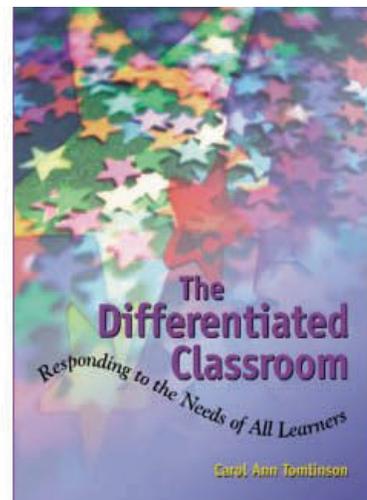
Conclusion

Putting our theory into practice allowed us to see how tiering could work or be modified within a real classroom setting to meet the needs of real students. What we learned was that tiering can be an effective grouping method which enables students to learn at their own pace. There was also a social benefit, as it allowed students who did not have the opportunity to take the leadership role within mix-ability groups to explore this responsibility in their tiered groups.

As we move toward having classrooms of our own, we look forward to implementing tiering as one of our grouping strategies. The more familiar we become with our future students, the more effective we will be at placing them within tiers so that they are comfortable, but also challenged. Our hope is that as we become more effective at providing tiered experiences, our students will become more engaged and invested in their learning.

Georgette Nairn and Stephanie Timmerman are graduates of the University of Manitoba Education Programme.

Richard Hechter is an Assistant Professor of Science and Mathematics Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba.



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- Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. U.S.A.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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**MAME SAG****October 22, 2010****Sandra J. Stone***Author of Creating the Multiage Classroom*

Successful multiage classrooms require teachers to shift attention from teaching curriculum to teaching children. A multiage class requires teachers to consider children as individuals, each with his or her own continuum of learning.

Sandra Stone

Sandra J. Stone is a professor at Northern Arizona University, where she is the Founder and Director of the National Multiage Institute, an international leader in multiage professional development training. A former primary multiage teacher, Dr. Stone conducts research in multiage education, is a frequent speaker at national and international educational conferences, and serves as a national and international multiage consultant. Author of numerous publications on early childhood education, literacy, and play, she is also the author of many books on multi-age education.

Come to the MAME SAG to hear Sandra talk about education topics relevant to multi-age, multi-level educators.



Manitoba Association of Multi-Age Educators
Multi-Age Education: A Child Centred Approach

H.S. Paul School, 160 Southglen Boulevard, Winnipeg

SAG October 22, 2010

AM Sessions

MA-101-Multi-age : A Child Centered Approach Sandra Stone

This session will provide the foundation for multiage classrooms which includes a child-centered approach. Participants will learn how a child-centered approach differs from a curriculum-centered approach, including a historical perspective of multiage and traditional education. Participants will also learn how to use strategies, assessment, and environment to provide a child-centered approach which will benefit all children in the grouping. Whole child and cross-age learning will be embedded in this approach. The focus is on fitting schools to children rather than fitting children to schools. This session will focus on an approach suitable for teachers from K-8.

MA-102-Multi-age : A Child Centered Approach via Video Conference in Birtle, Manitoba Sandra Stone

This session will be offered to participants via video conference. Participants will meet in Birtle, Manitoba

PM Break-Out Sessions

MA-201- Math in the Multiage Classroom (K-8) Sandra Stone

In this session, participants will learn how to support children in their math development in multiage classrooms.

MA-202- Math in the Multiage Classroom (K-8) via Video Conference in Birtle, Manitoba Sandra Stone

MA-203 Running Records Marsha Leary & Janet Walker, Reading Recovery Teachers, Louis Riel School Division

In this session, we will introduce how to take and score a reliable running record as an assessment of a child's text reading.

MA-204 Mimio in the Middle Years Matt Steingart, 7/8 Multi-age Teacher, Louis Riel School Division

Mimio is a new technology using an interactive whiteboard. In the classroom, it is an invaluable resource.

MA-205 Math Scrapbooks Linda Benson and Miles MacFarlane, Middle Years Teachers, Seven Oaks School Division

Combining the Language Arts, Math and Art in this project, students find real-life examples of math concepts and create scrapbook entries that identify, explain, and make connections with classroom learning.

MA-206-Mimio in the Early Years Laura Kellough, Jenna Bernardin, Karen Janssens, Meaghen Shangreux and Kelly McDonald, Teachers, Louis Riel School Division

This session is designed for the beginning Mimio users in K-4 classrooms.

MA-207-Warren's Wonderful Workshop Lana Warren, Teacher, Louis Riel School Division

Lana will share her journey of developing a literacy program in her classroom that is based on the "Daily Five" and "The CAFÉ Book" by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser – "The Sisters" (Stenhouse Publishers).

MA-208- Literacy and Numeracy Centres in Kindergarten Jean Reimer, Teacher, Louis Riel School Division

In this session, hands-on literacy and numeracy centre ideas will be presented.

MA-209-Games, Brain Teasers and Energizers Thor Weidenbacher, Middle Years Teacher, Louis Riel School Division

Games, brain teasers, energizers, and quick reviews to help students have fun in the classroom.

MA-210- The 20 Month Multi-Age Plan Brent Atkins and Alana White, Teachers, Louis Riel School Division

We are opening the books for your perusal! Using a flow-chart poster that is printable for your classroom we will facilitate discussion surrounding our 20 month plan.