

# *Grouping Students for* **READING INSTRUCTION**

## *Ideas for Teaching Reading More Effectively*

By Frieda Hoffer

**T**eaching reading in any school is a challenge. But managing children who read at levels ranging from first grade through high school in one classroom can really test a teacher's mettle!

Teachers of small schools often encounter unique problems related to curriculum management, class size, scheduling, and grouping for instruction. Reading instruction presents unusual challenges because students must be taught at a mastery level, and provided with enrichment and reinforcement.

In any school or classroom, children are grouped for a variety of instructional and social purposes. Learning is facilitated by placing together those who can profit most from common experiences.

Teachers of multigrade classrooms must also group children to facilitate instruction. Learning becomes more effective when the work has been shaped to the needs of the group. Circumventing the constraints of grade levels, teachers may need to regroup vertically for reading instruction. Many teachers find the management of such groups very difficult.

\*\*\*

Before Patti begins to teach she tells her students the standards of behavior she expects of them, as well as how they are to manage their materials and themselves. She does not assume that they know how she wants things done. She establishes routines at the beginning of the school year, and reinforces them daily with specific assignments.

As an observer in Patti's classroom, I can see that she sets rules and standards for herself as well as for her students. I notice these reminders under the glass top of her desk:

---

***Reading instruction provides unusual challenges because students must be taught at a mastery level and provided with enrichment and reinforcement.***

---

- a. Do they have everything they need at their desks? Will they need to get out of their seats for anything?
- b. Do they know where to get additional materials? Will they have to come and ask? Designate someone to whom they can go for help.
- c. Do they know not to interrupt me while I am teaching? Please!
- d. Do they need to talk to their neighbors? Do they have valid reasons?
- e. Do they know what to do when they are finished?

Patti teaches reading first to the third-grade group. She begins with this class because the first graders can finish their Bible activity and work independently during the time it takes her to teach a middle group.

Patti is consistent and positive. She reinforces appropriate behavior. I hear her praising students who remain on task. These compliments also help stop inappropriate behavior.

Patti often does not even need to speak to misbehaving students. Even though she has set her standards and

communicated them to the children, Patti still takes a few minutes each day to refresh her students' short memories. She also provides instructions about the objectives to be accomplished for that day. She outlines tasks and allows students to ask questions before they begin work on their assignments.

### **Keeping Everybody Busy**

The Life Reading Series is currently being used in North American Adventist schools. This series organizes reading by instructional levels. Teachers are expected to work with two, three, and sometimes four groups at a time in one classroom. Their most common cry is, "How can I keep the other students occupied while I am working with one group of children?"

The most common solution is seat-work that reinforces a variety of skills already taught. Some children finish this work rapidly, while others need constant direction. Patti uses helpers or monitors who answer questions and provide assistance with worksheets.

Patti's classroom has a reading center. This area is stocked with library books of all kinds, books that enhance the literary theme of the reading units, and a variety of supplementary readers appropriate to the reading levels of her students.

\*\*\*

### **Managing Group Learning\***

The following suggestions deal with general group management. They include ideas for planning instructional time, giving directions, correcting errors, and planning for slower learners.

1. *After giving them directions, ask your students if the instructions are clear.*

2. Clarify directions on all workbook and Studybook pages. Students may not understand the terminology. They may need further instruction about the concept or help with answering the questions.

3. When correcting errors, never criticize a student. Discuss the correct answer. The student may have had a logical reason for giving a particular answer.

Allow the students to change their answers. They will learn more if they correct their own work. This requires them to figure out why their answers were wrong. Although tests should be corrected by the teacher, most daily work can be corrected by each student.

4. Teach the lowest group second. These children generally have short attention spans. Have them work independently first, then provide instruction. Finally, assign follow-up or enrichment activities. This effectively breaks up the reading period into small time periods that do not require intensive and lengthy concentration.

5. Make time for an occasional "wide reading activity" or "free day." During this time, allow the children to do anything that pertains to reading. They may choose a library book or a supplemental

---

## **Teachers ask, "How can I keep the other students occupied while I am working with one group of children?"**

---

reader, play a reading game, watch a filmstrip that tells a story or provides a review of skills. This "free day" gives the children a breather from the daily routine and provides time for the teacher to work with those who need additional skill review.

### **Learning Centers**

6. Use learning centers for reinforcement and enrichment. The following pointers should be kept in mind when preparing materials and activities:

- a. Use reading games and centers to supplement and reinforce the basal reading program. They must be preceded by teacher instruction.
- b. Choose learning-center games and

activities that help individuals or small groups.

- c. Explain the objectives of each activity. Students need to know the how, why, or what of the activity to benefit from it.
- d. Use game and learning-center activities to evaluate student performance. These activities can highlight skill weaknesses.
- e. Adapt games to fulfill a variety of purposes. Activities can be used by small groups as well as by individuals and may be adapted to reinforce more than one skill.
- f. Keep learning centers simple. If your primary concern is the beauty of the center, you may lose sight of its main objective—meeting the needs of each student.
- g. Provide simple directions for learning-center projects. Activities should be self-checking.
7. Use interest centers that focus on language arts. The following labels may be used on the centers:
  - a. Take Five and Read!
  - b. So You Want to Write a Sequel!
  - c. Shhh! Authors at Work!
  - d. Tell a Story to a Friend.
  - e. Read to a Buddy!
  - f. Listen to Your Favorite Story.

g. Look for Details.

h. Classify Books.

8. Have students complete a penmanship assignment or write and illustrate a story. Such an activity will reinforce several skills at once.

9. Refer to your teacher's editions for more ideas on using the Skilpak and Studybook.

#### **More Reading Ideas**

10. Have students rewrite Life Series stories as plays, using lots of conversational passages. They should include suggestions for different acts, scenes,

---

### ***Many teachers find the management of vertical reading groups very difficult.***

---

and props. Tell them to follow the play format described in the dramatic selection of their reader.

11. Have pupils rewrite a story from another point of view. For example, if

the story was written in the third person, tell them to rewrite it in the first person.

12. Ask students reading a historical story to research and compare modes of dress, home life, transportation, and entertainment with customs of today.

13. After students have a story about a well-known person or event, have them choose another story or book about that character or event and compare the two.

14. Ask students to compare factual material with a realistic fictional portrayal of the same information.

15. At the completion of each unit,

have students read more about the theme of the unit. They can then write a short paper or make a class presentation about the similarities and differences between characters, setting, mood, and plot development.

★ ★ ★

Patti and I discussed these suggestions after school. Many of the ideas were not new to her. She had heard them at an in-service meeting for multigrade teachers and was already using some in her classroom.

Patti and I concluded that every classroom needs grouping to meet specific needs, and that multigrade classrooms have some natural groups. The key to group management is planning enough activities for students to complete independently. □

---

*\*The 15 ideas listed above are adapted from material or lecture on grouping given at Life Reading Series initial in-service.*

---

*Frieda Hoffer is Associate Director of Education for the Columbia Union Conference, Columbia, Maryland. She conducts seminars in multigrade teaching for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree that Andrews University offers in conjunction with Columbia Union College.*