

Fifth Grade Leveling Project
Joplin Elementary - Meridian, ID
Tami Bowlden, Jen Lund, and Shellie Pendell

Pilot Year: 2001-2002

Philosophy: Our goal is to help students grow and develop in math, language arts, and reading by providing instruction to differentiated groups of students at their own skill levels.

Goal: Every child will achieve growth in Math, Reading, and Language Arts, as described according to RIT score.

How Leveling Works:

76 students from three fifth grade classes will be involved in grouping. Students will be placed in groups for Math and Reading; all other subjects will be taught in their mixed ability homerooms. Initial placement will be based in part on the students' scores on the Fall MAP Tests. Teacher input will also be taken into consideration.

Reading classes will begin in the end of September, following testing. The students will remain in the same reading class until the end of first semester. At that time, the students will take the MAP Tests again and placement will be reconsidered. New groups will be formed, which will last through the second semester. All three groups will use a combination of basal text and novel studies; an outline of skills to be covered during the year has been developed. One teacher will lead a particular group, (high, middle, or low), for the year.

Math classes will also begin at the end of September. The math classes have been arranged in blocks of four-five weeks. During each block, all three groups will focus on the same basic concept, at varying levels of difficulty and depth. For example, during the month of October, the math classes focused on the concepts of whole number place value, addition, and subtraction; in November, the groups moved on to decimal concepts and skills. For each specific set of skills, the students will take a pre-test to determine placement; Level Test scores and teacher input will also be considered. The teachers will also switch between groups for each block to avoid having one teacher be identified as the "high teacher" and so forth.

Spring MAP Tests will be administered in May. Our goal is to have every student show growth in every category for Math and Reading, as compared to their test scores from the previous fall.

Timeline: (How Our Project Actually Took Place)

February, 2001: During the 2000-2001 school year, our school focused on differentiation within our classrooms. The idea for grouping students was suggested during an in-service in which we (the three fifth grade teachers) were brainstorming ideas for differentiation. With further discussion and input from our principal, the design for leveling began to come together.

Spring, 2001: We met with Dr. Linda Clark, the Director of Instruction for the Meridian School District. It was through her that we were able to get the information that we needed to using the MAP Tests as a basis for our leveling.

We attended a meeting with the Northwest Evaluation Association and received the Skills and Concepts continuum for RIT scores and guidelines on how RIT scores can be used and interpreted; this information is now more widely available.

May, 2001: Dr. Clark provided us with a **full day of professional leave** to organize our project. This was essential. We used this day to establish the basic framework for how the leveling would actually take place. This time spent planning made the actual process in the fall run smoothly.

Our planning:

1st – We developed philosophy and goal statements, to make sure that we were thinking along the same lines.

2nd – We created an **outline of concepts for the year**. We wanted to be sure that all students cover all concepts, regardless of which group they are in. Our reading outline was most specific; it was based on the "M.A.L.T. Goal Structure" outline, which we had received from the NWEA. Our math outline was based on our own experience as to the progression of skills throughout the year.

- 3rd – The next step was to decide which teacher would teach what. We were able to make choices based on our own preferences and experience; this went very smoothly.
- 4th – The final step for the day was to correlate basal text units and novels with the goals and groups in reading. The result was our Fifth Grade Goals for Reading outline. (Out Math and Reading plans are attached.)

We met with our principal and Dr. Clark to share our plan, using some of their suggestions to make adjustments. (For example, we had originally planned to switch reading groups at the end of each quarter, but decided instead to switch at the semester, following Winter MAP Testing.)

Our principal helped to arrange our schedule of specials (P.E., Music, etc.) for the year to allow us blocks of time for switching. This was somewhat difficult, as it affected the schedules of other teachers.

Summer, 2001: On our own, we each worked to put together ideas for the groups that we would have.

September, 2001: We began the school year conducting all classes within our homerooms. MAP Tests were held at the end of September. As the students took the tests, we wrote down the scores that appeared on the computer screen when each student was finished. These numbers were used to **form the first groups**.

In a **shared file cabinet** we created two files for each student: one for math and one for reading. The files were color-coded by homeroom. In the files we placed test scores, unit tests, STAR results, and other information. These files were particularly helpful during Parent/Teacher Conferences.

We used another professional day to work on placing the students in groups. A list of students, organized by RIT score, was our primary resource for forming those first groups. Students were informed on a Friday which teachers they would each have for Math and Reading; groups began the following Monday, September 24.

Our Daily Schedule:

9:00 – School begins. Students go to homeroom.

9:30 – Switch to Math class. Students take with them supplies for Math and Reading. Since students are both leaving and coming into each classroom, we did some practicing and experimenting to find the easiest way to make the switch. It now goes fairly smoothly.

10:25 – Students take their supplies to their Reading class.

10:30 – Recess

10:45 – When the bell rings at the end of recess, students line up at the door of their Reading classroom.

11:30 – Reading ends. Students switch back to their homerooms.

We also agreed on a homework schedule to help establish consistency between the classrooms.

Mondays – Math

Tuesdays – English and/or Reading

Wednesdays – Social Studies and/or Science

We have had some parents with concerns about the classes into which their child has been placed. Using RIT scores to do the placement makes it easier for us to show the parents that the class their child is in is the best for him or her; it helps to take that pressure off of us.

We have used professional half-days several other times during the year to allow time for forming new math groups, in the middle of each quarter.

October, 2001: After the first switch to new math classes, the students each completed a survey to indicate how they felt about the program so far. Most really liked the opportunity to have more than one teacher. Their biggest complaint? Having to carry "all those heavy books" around. ☺

November, 2001: We encountered a problem while doing **report cards** that we hadn't anticipated. How could we combine grades from two different teachers and end up with an accurate score? We realized that we couldn't, so instead we give the students two Math grades on their report card, one from each of the two units for that quarter. Grades are color-coded to help parents and students understand what each grade is for.

We had open Parent/Teacher Conferences, allowing parents to come and speak to any or all of us as needed.

December, 2001: I (Tami Bowlden) am using this project as the basis of a research project for my Master's Degree. I completed a research paper on ability grouping, and was pleased to see that we were already using many of the research-based suggestions for successful grouping, such as allowing for movement between groups.

January, 2002: The students took the Math and Reading MAP Tests at the end of first semester. We used these scores to make some changes in our Reading classes and to assess progress. Some results were encouraging, though we were frustrated with the number of scores that actually dropped. It was a good reminder of the limitations of relying on one test score.

We shared our results with Dr. Clark and learned of some opportunities we would have to share what we had done with other teachers.

Spring, 2002: We have been pleased with this project overall. While it was a lot of work to set up, it has made classroom instruction easier because we do not have as broad of range of student needs to meet. We have been able to cover material in ways that we hadn't been able to do before, giving the lower students more basic practice and allowing for the higher students to be appropriately challenged.

Our biggest problem has been **communication with parents**. We each send home weekly newsletters with information about our homeroom, but we haven't found a way to easily include information about what is going on in other classes. If helps that we are all covering the same basic concepts. We will be looking for ways to improve this for next year.

Our Math Goal Outline:

Aug. 27 – Sept. 21	(in homeroom) Measurement and Probability
Sept. 24 – Nov. 1	Place Value, Addition and Subtraction of Whole Numbers
Nov. 5 – Nov. 30	Decimal Concepts
Dec. 3 – Jan. 17	Multiplication
Jan. 22 – Feb. 22	Division
Feb. 25 – March 22	Geometry
April 1 – April 26	Fractions
April 28 – May 31	Addition and Subtraction of Fractions

Each Math Unit ends with a post-test, which are different for each group. The teachers created most of these tests. Final grades are not weighted according to which group the student was in, but are simply an average of the work the student did in that class.

Pre-tests for each unit were given the week before the new classes would start. The same pre-test is given to every student; these tests came from our Math textbook series.

Our Reading Outline: (See attached page for details on Concepts)

Dates:	Concept Focus:	Basal Unit:	Novels:
Sept. 24 – Nov. 1	Reading Mechanics	"Catastrophe"	<u>Castle in the Attic</u> , <u>War with Grandpa</u> , <u>The Kid in the Red Jacket</u>
Nov. 5 – Jan. 17	Literal Comprehension	"Try to See it My Way"	<u>Fighting Ground</u> , <u>George Washington's Socks</u> , <u>Sign of the Beaver</u>
Jan. 22 – March 21	Knowledge Expansion	"From the Prairie to the Sea"	<u>Bridge to Terabithia</u> , <u>Stepping on the Cracks</u> , <u>On My Honor</u>
April 1 – May 31	Evaluative Comprehension	"Do You Believe This?"	<u>Holes</u> , <u>My Side of the Mountain</u> , <u>Dear Mr. Henshaw</u>

All students took the unit tests for each basal unit. Other assignments varied greatly. We allowed for some flexibility in the novel choices, but otherwise followed the plan successfully.