

# **Methods of Organizing the Teaching Activity in Multi-Grade Classes**

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

class; lesson; multi-grade education;  
forms of organization; design.

In multi-grade classes, there are different versions of each type of lesson depending on the school subject, the manner of integrating the lesson contents and the content's particularities, volume, and density, but also the age level of the students. From this point of view, the classification of lessons according to these criteria could be reconsidered as the teaching of the subjects is in a continuous dynamism marked by creativity and not by the usual rigors that would require different algorithms. This fact can also be supported by the integration within each lesson of recreational moments, lasting between five and fifteen minutes. Therefore, the stages of each lesson will be modified according to various factors related to the specifics of the activity in multi-grade education. The present study demonstrates how the organization and conduct of lessons differ from one case to another depending on the types of lessons that are combined; it also shows that, for the judicious distribution of time, it is necessary to carefully study the content of the lessons and compare the materials provided for each class. Less time can be allocated to direct activity in the younger class if the students are familiarized with certain concepts throughout previous lessons, which they can then deepen or expand through independent activity, while in the older class the material is entirely new and requires more in-depth explanation.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Klasse; Unterricht;  
Simultanunterricht;  
Organisationsformen;  
Unterrichtsplanung.

Im Simultanunterricht gibt es je nach Unterrichtsdisziplin, Art der Integration der Inhalte, deren Spezifität, Umfang und Dichte, aber auch nach der Altersstufe der Schüler, verschiedene Variationen jeder Unterrichtsart. Unter diesem Gesichtspunkt könnte die Klassifizierung des Unterrichts nach diesen Kriterien überdacht werden, denn Fachdidaktik befindet sich in einer kontinuierlichen Dynamik, geprägt von Kreativität, nicht von Strenge, die verschiedene Algorithmen implizieren. Diese Tatsache kann auch durch die Integration von Freizeitmomenten in jede Unterrichtsstunde, die zwischen 5 und 15 Minuten dauern. Daher werden die Phasen jeder Unterrichtsstunde entsprechend verschiedenen Faktoren im Zusammenhang mit den Besonderheiten der Aktivität im Simultanunterricht geändert.

Die vorliegende Studie zeigt, wie sich die Organisation und Durchführung des Unterrichts je nach den kombinierten Unterrichtsarten von Fall zu Fall unterscheidet. Es zeigt auch, dass es für eine sinnvolle Zeiteinteilung notwendig ist, den Inhalt der Unterrichtsstunden sorgfältig zu studieren und die für jede Klasse bereitgestellten Materialien zu vergleichen. In der jüngeren Klasse kann weniger Zeit für die direkte Aktivität eingeplant werden, wenn die Schüler bestimmte Konzepte aus früheren Unterrichtsstunden kennen, um sie dann durch selbstständige Aktivitäten zu vertiefen oder zu erweitern, während in der älteren Klasse der Stoff völlig neu ist und erfordert ausführlichere Erklärungen.

## 1. Introduction

Designing, organizing, and carrying out the educational process in multi-grade classes presents itself as necessary in certain situations, such as the existence of a small school population or more remote rural settlements. The teacher must, in these situations, carry out their activity with two, three, four, or even five categories of students of different ages, leading the learning activity according to different curricula, moving from one topic to another within the same lesson, engaging in a difficult and complex labour in order to fully comply with the subject curricula for each individual class as well as the time allocated to achieve the objectives (National Education Law no. 1/2011).

The forms of organization of the didactic activity concern the organizational structure or, respectively, the organizational framework used for carrying out formal educational activities. More precisely, they refer to the array of specific methods of carrying out this process. Regarding the forms of organization of the students' activity, they refer to the specific ways of designing, but especially of implementing the interactions between teachers and students, of establishing and promoting certain types of collaboration between them in accordance with the objectives pursued (Bocoş & Jucan, 2019).

In multi-grade education, the forms of organization of student activity refer to: frontal organization of student activity, group organization of



student activity in a multi-grade class, paired organization of student activity, individual organization of student activity in multi-grade classes, combined organization (Bocoş & Jucan, 2019).

## 2. Theoretical foundation

*The lesson within multi-grade primary education—the main form of organization of didactic activity. Types of lessons used in multi-grade education.*

From the whole range of activities organized as part of multi-grade education, it can be noted that the actual conduct of a lesson itself exhibits the most specific elements when compared to normal lessons, among which we list:

- Increasing the share of students' independent learning or work by up to 50% during a lesson; furthermore, for high-achieving students or those with a faster pace of work, additional, optional assignments are prepared;
- Reducing the time spent on transmitting new knowledge to 10-15 minutes and optimally alternating, based on the establishment of stages or phases, the direct activity of the teacher with the independent activity of the students;
- Gradually replacing the oral assessment of 3-5 students in each lesson with a written task for the whole class;
- Cultivating the students' voluntary attention and their ability to concentrate by fostering the conditions for focused, fast, and intensive activity coupled with the teacher's use of an unobtrusive tone in the direct activity with the students of the other class, which would not distract the first group (Catalano & Albulescu, 2021).

In the educational practice, when it comes to the types of lessons most encountered in multi-grade teaching, the following are present:

- Lessons aimed at transmitting/acquiring new knowledge;
- Lessons aimed at the development/consolidation of skills and abilities/knowledge;
- Lessons aimed at the review and systematization of knowledge;
- Lessons aimed at assessment, control, and evaluation.

However, specialized literature still provides a model phasing of the lessons, according to the mentioned types. We offer, as an example, the specific stages of the new knowledge acquisition lesson, which

can also undergo changes depending on the exact context (Catalano & Albulescu, 2019):

1. Organizational moment;
2. Checking the homework due for the day (if any);
3. Fostering the motivation specific to learning;
4. Announcing the lesson subject and lesson objectives;
5. Communication of new knowledge;
6. Consolidating knowledge / Ensuring retention and transfer;
7. Assigning homework;
8. Ending the lesson.

In multi-grade education, the order of these stages is the one specified above, but it can be modified if the teacher considers it necessary. Thus, the creation of specific learning motivation can take place after the announcement of the lesson subject and the lesson objectives. Similarly, these two stages can be merged, to the extent that the teacher manages to convey the subject and objectives in such a way as to stimulate the students' motivation for learning. The teacher must expertly manage the time allocated to each stage in the lesson and master its content. Thanks to the innovations in teaching and learning, the communication of new knowledge can be based on discovery learning, playful or game-based learning, or experiential learning, with the role of the teacher no longer being solely that of a transmitter of information but rather its facilitator. Furthermore, in certain situations, retention and transfer may be included in the homework assignment sequence, if the latter is explained. In this way, the transfer between knowledge or skills that were assimilated during the lesson can be ensured (Catalano & Albulescu, 2021).

In multi-grade classes, in general, three fundamental types of lessons are possible, combined as follows:

- Skills and abilities development lesson for each class;
- Consolidation lessons or assessment and evaluation lessons for each class;
- Lessons in which new knowledge is transmitted and acquired for one class, and the content of the previous lesson is consolidated or checked/assessed for the other class.

### 3. Research results

*The alternation of direct activity with independent activity as a premise of multi-grade teaching. Presentation of examples of good practice.*

In the activity of teaching two classes at the same time, the teacher must conduct either lessons of the same type or lessons of different types during the same hour, unlike the teacher who works in a single class and who organizes each lesson according to its type. There are several situations that we encounter in multi-grade classes, situations that we will now present and analyse further (Pavelea & Pavelea, 2005):

- *Case I* encountered when new knowledge acquisition lessons are held in both classes (see Table 1);
- *Case II* encountered when in one class the lesson is aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge, while in the other class there is a lesson aimed at developing skills and abilities, assessment, or review (see Table 2);
- *Case III* encountered when evaluation lessons are planned for both classes or when review lessons are combined with assessment lessons (see Table 3).

Table 1. Case I encountered when in both classes there are lessons with predominant tasks of acquiring new knowledge

Allocated time		3rd Grade Acquiring new knowledge	5th Grade Acquiring new knowledge
1st Phase	10 min.	<b>Independent activity</b> (checking previous knowledge or preparing for the new lesson)	<b>Direct activity</b> (checking homework and giving out instructions for the independent activity)
2nd Phase	20 min.	<b>Direct activity</b> (teaching-learning the new content)	<b>Independent activity</b> (exercises and activities for reviewing, repeating, or investigating knowledge)
3rd Phase	15 min.	<b>Independent activity</b> (consolidating knowledge)	<b>Direct activity</b> (teaching-learning the new content)
4th Phase	5 min.	<b>Direct activity</b> (checking the independent work and reviewing or consolidating the received knowledge)	<b>Independent activity</b> (consolidating the new knowledge)

Table 2. Case II encountered when in one class the lesson is aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge, while in the other class there is a lesson aimed at developing skills and abilities, assessment, or review

Allocated time		3rd Grade Acquiring new knowledge	5th Grade Skills and abilities development Review or assessment
1st Phase	10 min.	<b>Independent activity</b> (checking previous knowledge or preparing for the new lesson)	<b>Direct activity</b> (reviewing the knowledge necessary for the independent activity)
2nd Phase	20 min.	<b>Direct activity</b> (teaching-learning the new content)	<b>Independent activity</b> (exercises and activities for applying previous knowledge)
3rd Phase	15 min.	<b>Independent activity</b> (consolidating knowledge)	<b>Direct activity</b> (checking the independent work and their previous knowledge)
4th Phase	10 min.	<b>Direct activity</b> (checking the independent work and reviewing or consolidating the received knowledge)	<b>Independent activity</b>

Table 3. Case III encountered when evaluation lessons are planned for both classes or when review lessons are combined with assessment lessons

Allocated time		3rd Grade Review or assessment	5th Grade Assessment
1st Phase	10 min.	<b>Independent activity</b> (checking and refreshing previous knowledge)	<b>Direct activity</b> (instructions for the independent assessment)
2nd Phase	20-25 min.	<b>Direct activity</b> (repeating and systematizing knowledge)	<b>Independent activity</b> (exercises and activities for assessing previous knowledge)
3rd Phase	15-20 min.	<b>Independent activity</b> (exercises for consolidating the reviewed or assessed knowledge)	<b>Direct activity</b> (reviewing and evaluating the independent work)

### 4. Discussions

The acquisition of knowledge, whether it is achieved through engaging the students in a directed (guided) reception or through unguided discovery, is a task that cannot be left to their independent activity. Such a didactic task can be carried out only in the 4th grade, in exceptional cases, when the new knowledge is closely related to the previously acquired material and can be deduced from this material (Catalano & Albulescu, 2020).

We consider to be the most difficult, in a multi-grade context, the lessons aimed at acquiring new knowledge, given the difficulty of combining the independent work of the students with the activity carried out under the direct guidance of the teaching staff. This way of pairing the lessons also presents difficulties due to the fact that, within the same classroom period, the teacher must simultaneously direct the acquisition and the consolidation of knowledge for each class.

Easier to conduct are the lessons in which new knowledge is acquired with one class, and knowledge is consolidated with the other. The activity will begin with the class whose main purpose is the teaching-learning of new knowledge, while the students of the other class will independently perform exercises from the contents to be revised. After the teaching of the new knowledge is finished, the students will be given an exercise that will be carried out independently, while the teacher checks the activities of the other class.

In the case of lessons aimed at the consolidation of knowledge, skills, and abilities in certain classes, one of the classes will be given independent activity, and the other will be engaged directly for about 20 minutes, then the direct activity of the teacher and the independent activity of the students are reversed. In this manner, both classes will have 20-25 minutes of work under the direct guidance of the teacher and approximately the same time interval for independent work.

From a methodological point of view, it is recommended that the teacher start the lesson with the class where an independent task can be carried out more easily or where the subject for independent work can be preceded by oral exercises or a discussion with the students. If the teacher intends to give an independent task to one of the classes during a lesson, then he must start with this class. After being assigned the task for the independent activity, the students can work alone for the duration of the entire lesson.

In lessons of this type, the direct work of the teacher with the students of both classes is mandatory both for explaining the independent work assignment and, at the end of it, for assessing whether the proposed objectives were achieved.

For example, the lesson plans designed in order to teach Communication in the Romanian Language, respectively Romanian Language and Literature, in conditions of multi-grade teaching must include, in addition to the generally known information, the main

sequences specific to lessons of this type and their content, with alternatives for the independent activity, including worksheets for differentiating the didactic tasks for certain students based on their progress made following the previous lessons, if applicable. Within the lesson plan, the sequences of direct activity of the teacher with the students of one class must be clearly delimited from the moments of independent activity for the students of the other class (Catalano & Albulescu, 2021).

The didactic activity of teaching Communication in the Romanian Language and Romanian Language and Literature in several classes at the same time can be summarized in the following way:

- First a written task of independent work, not too large in volume, will be assigned to the class that the teacher intends to deal with first;

- The second class will solve an assignment in continuation of the exercises from the previous lesson or an independent work task previously prepared and whose duration must be equal to the duration of the direct activity of the first class;

- The independent activity of the students in the first class with which the teacher started the lesson is checked, the new lesson is explained under the teacher's direct guidance, and the direct activity ends. The students are then given the topic for independent work during the class (being a new lesson it is preferable for the students to work on the tasks in groups) and at home. Independent work is preferable to be carried out in groups, especially in the case of new lessons, or individually, at the blackboard, in order to facilitate the direct overview of the teacher (even if the teacher is engaged directly with the other class, the teacher can intervene, succinctly, for guidance/correction of individual work);

- The teacher checks the independent work of the students of the second class and offers indications for its continuation or continues the activity, guiding the students or explaining elements of the new content. The teacher then assigns independent work for this class to complete during the class period and at home, aiming at the retention of new knowledge or consolidation of knowledge and skills (depending on the type of lesson).

As in the case of regular schools, in educational units where the instructional-educational process takes place in conditions of multi-grade activity, the instructional-educational activity cannot be reduced only to its main form - the lesson - but expanded and

supplemented by other forms as well, with great educational, developmental, and informational values (Catalano & Albulescu, 2022).

For example, the specific content of the Science textbook requires the organization of some forms of didactic activity that take place in the school yard. This can be used to procure the necessary material for the lesson or to highlight some biological processes.

Within the activities for teaching geography, the most important forms through which activities can be organized are readings, the study of the local horizon, geographical games, exhibitions, the preparation of teaching aids with the engagement of students, daytrips, and visits (Catalano & Albulescu, 2022).

## 6. Conclusions

The *special* preparation and organization of the lessons also stem from the fact that teaching to several classes at the same time implies the judicious use of learning time, and a harmonious combination of the two basic forms of the lesson—the direct or guided activity with the teacher and the independent activity of the students. While the teacher leads the lesson of one class, the students of the other class/es must solve didactic tasks concerning the subject of their lesson, tasks that contribute to the retention, consolidation, and operationalisation of knowledge as well as to the development of thinking and creativity.

Considering the essential role of independent activity in conditions of multi-grade teaching, it is necessary to carry out a process of careful, deliberate selection of the activities, with an exacting application and assessment of them, and possibly also a self-evaluation of the completion of the tasks.

For the independent activity, varied types and themes should be chosen and distributed in such a way as to stimulate the students' participation in the lesson. When teaching lessons in conditions of multi-grade education, interactive teaching methods must be predominantly used.

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