

Differentiation for students of different grade levels in the same classroom

Combination classrooms are those in which students of a similar age are taught together under a single teacher. Proponents of alternative grouping approaches maintain that multigrade or multiage grouping is better “aligned with children’s natural groupings and learning tendencies” (Ong, Allison, & Haladyna, 2000). While multiage or combination classes may provide children with social and learning environments in which they can progress at their own pace, they present unique implementation challenges to teachers and administrators. Additional challenges are posed by the testing requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act and the very specific grade-level expectations outlined in the CCSS (Mariano & Kirby, 2009). The CA CCSS and CCSS both lay out particular progressions by grade.

By looking at the program maps in Section 1, a teacher can see that each grade level presents units that challenge students to read within the middle school grade band—starting a little lower in sixth grade and pushing a little bit higher in eighth grade. So, any student at any middle school grade level will have sufficient challenge with complex text when tackling any of the units in any of the three grades of Amplify’s program. And, given the flexibility presented by the differentiation for advanced students in every unit, a teacher could teach a group of sixth- and seventh-graders, using the sixth-grade content, maintaining one classroom community around shared content while still pushing seventh-grade advanced students to a sufficient challenge using that differentiated content. And, during Flex Days, the teacher could provide appropriate grade-level content, as indicated by the language standard-based pacing map.

But, in order for students to address the specific requirements of each of the grade-level standards, they need to complete the activities in the way that they are written for their particular grades. So, ultimately, if teaching two grades in the same classroom, the teacher can pull together the two grades around shared content and sufficiently challenge students across both grades; however, in order to fully teach the standards of each grade, the teacher will need to teach the separate content from each grade’s units.