



Program Enhancement

How to Establish a Fast-Track Program

A Fast-Track (FT) program is a strategy that helps meet the educational demands of students ready for advanced learning. The class is normally offered in grades K-5, but may be extended to grades 6-8 where self-contained classrooms are available.

Overview

It doesn't take long for teachers to observe a number of students who demonstrate an ability to move ahead in the curriculum. Even though the Christian school curriculum may outpace public school counterparts, there is more that could be done to maximize a children's academic potential. The fast-track concept is one option to accomplish this.

Gifted/Talented vs Fast-Track

The fast-track program is not a gifted and talented program. Most parents feel that their child is gifted and talented in some area of their life; it may not be in the area of academics, but in sports, music, or art. By placing a child in a gifted/talented program without regard for these other areas sends a message to parents their child must not be gifted or talented. Thus, using a fast-track concept to identify this group of students helps avoid parental conflict.

Student Selection and Criteria

A fast-track classroom is one in which students qualify to participate through a selection process that may include a number of different measures. For example, standardized testing scores (usually scoring at or above the 90 NPR), classroom productivity grades, evaluation from classroom teachers. Victory Christian School uses the following criteria for selection.

<u>Evaluation Tool</u>	<u>Grades 2-5</u>	<u>Grade 1</u>	<u>Grade K5</u>
SAT Reading	30%	45%	n/a
SAT Math	25%	40%	n/a
SAT Language	15%	n/a	n/a
SAT Spelling	15%	n/a	n/a
Productivity	15%	15%	15%
Kindergarten Screening	n/a	n/a	70%
Core Procedures	n/a	n/a	15%
	100%	100%	100%

The "productivity" score is an end-of-year evaluation to determine how efficiently the student performs in the classroom. The Kindergarten Screening is a readiness test done for each child preparing to enter K5. The Core Procedures is a part of the screening that tests how quickly the student learns new words. (Contact Insights for more information on the Kindergarten Screening program.)

The scores are added together to determine a "Placement Score" for each individual student. The students who have the highest placement scores will be placed in the Fast-Track class until the class is determined full by the school principal. This information can be placed on an Excel spreadsheet. (See Excel: Selection Process)

Organization

The Fast-Track program best matches schools that have sufficient enrollment to accommodate two classrooms at each grade level. If there is only one classroom for each grade, the fast-track program can be implemented within a single classroom much like what is done to establish skill groups.

Fast-Track classrooms are generally not used in middle and high school. At these grade levels, students will begin to separate themselves through the elective process, choosing classes according to their needs. This eliminates the need for a secondary Fast-Track program. Honors classes, pre-advanced placement, and advanced placement classes are available at the middle school and high school levels for students needing additional academic challenges.

Curriculum

The majority of the curriculum in a Fast-Track class is identical to the curriculum of the other classes in the same grade level. The difference is that the Fast-Track class moves through the curriculum at a faster pace (hence the term "Fast-Track"). "The special thing about Fast-Track," says Mrs. Hadsell (1st grade Fast-Track teacher), "is that even though we move faster through the skills, the children are not skipping any critical steps in the educational process. In fact, we are able to take them to an even higher level by providing farther enrichment to the lessons we teach." Since the class is able to complete more of the educational objectives in a shorter period of time, it gives the teacher the ability to explore additional topics and bring greater intellectual challenges to the young learners.

In Kindergarten, if a school is using the ABeka curriculum, the Fast-Track class should use the ABeka Advanced K5 curriculum. Linda Ophoff, a Kindergarten teacher at Victory Christian School sets her Fast-Track curriculum as follows:

We move quickly through the curriculum reviewing the short & long vowel words and simple consonant blends and then slow down when we get to new (special sounds) diagraphs and complex consonant blends.

We read through all the Regular K5 and Adv. K5 readers. Then we start into the Sing, Spell, Read and Write 1st grade readers. Most children finish the first grade readers and at least start the 2nd grade readers.

We also do a lot of creative writing. Writing stories together and writing stories in their work stations.

We use a word wall to introduce sight words and we read, write and spell them in class.

The math curriculum is the same for K5 and Advanced K5. We used the Bob Jones University curriculum for the first time this year. It does an excellent job in preparing the children for first grade.

We also take time to explore areas of interest the children may have. We read a story about sharks a couple of weeks ago, so that Friday we had Shark Day. The children brought stuffed sharks, shark books, shark jokes and we wrote a story about what we learned about sharks.

When asked, "How does Fast-Track differs from a first grade classes, she says,

Because most of the students entering Fast-Track are good readers, we move quickly through the readers that are provided and finish and additional reader called, "Down by The Sea," which most classes do not get to at all. I put a lot of focus on fluency and

expression in reading. In addition to that, there are three Chapter books (some 2nd grade Bob Jones books) that we go through as a group. I have also added the Helen Keller unit to incorporate some additional history, sign language, etc.

In the daily work, I take many of the items that we teach to a higher level. For example, if we are teaching to the 10s and 100s place, I take it to the 1000s place. If we are teaching adding 10s with carrying, I will teach adding 100s with carrying, and then 1000s, etc. I also do things like this in phonics, for example, when alphabetizing, I add in dictionary skills and we start much sooner alphabetizing to the second, third, etc. letter. We also include a lot more of the daily oral language activities. I also add in some critical thinking skills.

We make it through the Science, History, Health and Safety Manners, and Community Helpers books, which is something that many of the other classes do not find the time to complete. In addition to these things, we do some additional creative writing stories, letters, etc.

I have incorporated more learning activities into the rotations that we do during the afternoon reading groups. The students rotate through a variety of centers and games geared toward reinforcing the skills that are being taught throughout the lessons. The children have really enjoyed this.

The follow are examples on how other teachers at Victory Christian School adjusted the Bob Jones curriculum to accommodate a Fast-Track class.

Second Grade (As presented by Joan Hunsaker, Victory Christian School)

Math – All classes follow the standard Bob Jones curriculum.

In Fast-Track the teacher progresses a little faster than the other classes, but not a lot due to the time it takes to learn how to use the manipulatives which are key to success with this program. The challenges the students with added math thinking skills. The teacher uses a “I Have, Who Has” to encourage math skills as well as listening and thinking skills. Students have an AM paper each morning. These always contain some math, and part of the school year, it is a math sheet like *Math Mind Benders* that challenges their thinking using math and logic skills. These are not graded, but we go over them together to discuss how to get the answers.

Reading – The teacher covers the stories and workbook pages more quickly with FT students. They complete most stories in one day which means covering 2 lessons in one teaching. The teacher uses commercial sheets from a book called *Daily Warm-Ups Reading* to encourage comprehension skills; this is done 3-4 times a week. FT BookIt goals differ from the other classes in that chapter books are the requirement and they must have at least 200 pages. During the months of October, January, February, and March, students have been required to write a book report on one of their chapter books, then give it orally in class. One of the purposes of this is to expose classmates to books that they may want to read. No less than 4 book reports are required during the year. FT uses the Barnell-Loft skill books which are done as homework. The teacher also has a “Word Wall” on which she places new curriculum words and words that come up in discussion that are good for students to know.

Spelling – All classes use the ACSI Spelling program. In the FT students are given 2 challenge words each week. Those that have consistently not missed any, or very few words, on the weekly pretest, are given an additional 2 Extra Challenge words each week. Students have a double-sided laminated sheet in their Information Folders that has High-Frequency Words on one side and Commonly Misspelled Words on the other side to use for creative writing.

Listening and Thinking Skills – One of the most important goals for a Fast-Track teacher is to motivate students to think and to not be afraid of things that are new or different from their previous experiences. Do oral and written listening, reasoning, logic, and thinking work with them. To do this, use materials from various commercial teacher resource books. Use the *I Have, Who Has* activity for math to train listening and concentration skills as it requires each student to really be “on their toes” to keep the activity going. Use a commercial book called *Look, Listen, Think* which helps students develop the following skills: visual discrimination and memory skills, listening comprehension and memory skills. Use several logic-type books with activities that require students to think and helps students develop their deductive reasoning skills. Place these activities on overhead transparencies and run off sheets for students to use as they go through the process. Adapt this activity for use on a SmartBoard. Design a 3-ring notebooks for students with logic puzzles they solve using colored circles. Finally, do oral problems which they answer with quiet hands, secret show of hands, or sometimes sheets that they write answers on to help develop their listening and thinking skills.

Writing –The mechanics of writing is the same as the other classes. However, FT students do more creative writing. Try to teach them to have a purpose for their writing and to organize their thoughts before beginning to write a story. Then, go over the stories and improve them before the final copying. The FT class does a published book that is a collection of one story and illustration from each student.

Special Reports – Besides book reports, students do several other reports throughout the year. After some reading/teaching in class, they are given a guide to use to do a report using library books, internet, and other resources from school and home. Early in the year, students choose an animal they want to learn more about and do an Animal Report (with a project) that they give orally in the class. They also do one on a country and on a state.

Special Morning Work – Each morning students pick up one or two papers when they come in to begin working on. These are never graded, but we go over them each day giving and discussing the answers. The teacher pulls sticks with student numbers on them for each question (and even each correction on the language sentence), so students know they will be called on 1-3 times during the check each morning. They have a DOL sheet which includes the following skills: 1) Language mechanics and usage - sentences, letters, addresses to make corrections on. 2) Math - various kinds of problems that challenge students to think. 3) Geography and History - Students are exposed to interesting facts of both geography and history. They learn to use maps on the walls or in the Assignment Guides to find answers and learn new things. 4) Analogies - Students do 2 analogies each day. They soon go from not having a clue what the answer would be to being very good at seeing the relationship that is going on.

Halfway through the year, one day the analogy is replaced with an idiom to help them learn common idioms that they may hear people use. They learn to look beyond the literal meaning of the words to the thought that is being conveyed.

The other paper is called the AM Work and is made up of sheets from various commercial books. They cover reading, math, and language skills that go from quiet easy to progressively more challenging concepts as the year goes on

Third Grade (As presented by Dana Hicks, Victory Christian School)

The FT class differs from other third grade classes in a number of different areas.

Morning Focus – Language - To get the kids focused immediately, a Daily Language Review is done to reinforce Language and Writing skills previously introduced. This is done every week of school.

Bible – Sword Drills are done during Bible time from February until the end of school to help the children identify books, chapter, and individual verses in the Bible. Many of the scripture passages are put to music for easier memorization. Fast-Track kids can say (sing) the Old & New Testament Books of the Bible.

Reading – The Fast-Track class goes faster with the Bob Jones reading curriculum. For example, a two-day story may be done in one day because the students are reading at an independent fluent level.

For Homework, *Barnell Loft*, a detailed reading comprehension program is used to work on isolated reading comprehension skills in a specific period of time. Children grade their units the next morning for immediate feedback and corrections are done that day.

Other comprehension sheets are given as homework throughout the year that compliment other content areas and reinforce reading comprehension at a higher level on Bloom's Taxonomy.

The Book-It! Reading program requires Fast-Track to log 25 extra minutes a month.

Spelling – In ALL content areas, Fast-Track students are expected to correctly spell all "word bank" words or words that are high frequency words listed on the page/test. Fast-Track has 5 vocabulary words and definitions added to each spelling list. These words have to be written correctly when the definition is dictated. Comprehensive vocabulary tests are given every 6th week.

Math – Fast-Track Math goes faster than the regular classrooms. With the new curriculum, it is best to double up on the first two chapters. The kids come into 3rd grade having a solid foundation in place value, so moving ahead quickly does not affect them. Fast-Track also learns the multiplication and division facts up through 12 rather than 10. We start multiplication and division speed drills quicker also. Lovin' Logic Games provided in the kid's white notebooks are used as supplement to create logical thinking skills. I Have, Who Has Listening Games are also used along with each unit to reinforce content area and enhance listening skills.

Cursive Writing – Fast-Track students complete two pages of cursive handbook writing per day and complete the book by Christmas. Cursive writing is required of them in all subject areas through the remainder of the year. Cursive grades are given on weekly spelling tests.

The Writing Process – In September, Fast-Track students are mastering a 3-5 sentence paragraph. In October for mission's month, I introduce my students to a 5 paragraph writing process using the *Write From the Beginning* Process. As a group, we write our first 5 paragraph paper over JAPAN. In December, the students write their own personal 5 paragraph paper over Christmas in Different Countries. In March, we write individual 5 paragraph papers on being Principal for the Year. For a Mother's Day gift, short story starter paragraphs are written and compiled into a book.

Imaginative Story Writing – Fast-Track students make a Class Book by writing and illustrating a story. All are combined to create our class book. The students use the writing process for paragraphs previously learned in the year.

Fast-Track students are expected to write complete sentences when directions on the page call for it or the teacher adds that to the directions.

History and Science – Fast-Track starts and completes more comprehension checks in these content areas. On tests where there is list of answers, I ask that the entire list is written as the answer rather than listing the suggested number. Bonus is given if this is completed with success.

Computers – Fast-Track attends a weekly computer class to strengthen Math skills by Using the Math Academy Program