



Summary of Multiage Research and Writings

From Schaumburg District 54 Superintendent Ed Rafferty:

A multiage classroom setting can further promote 21st century skills. For more than 10 years, we have seen tremendous academic and social gains in schools using this type of instructional programming.

While school districts have used multiage configurations to address uneven numbers of students at different grade levels, research supports that academic and social benefits also accompany this model. Multiage classroom structures allow for more flexible grouping, encourage children to work cooperatively and promote more of a family and community atmosphere.

In District 54, strong student achievement data from our multiage classrooms supports not only its ongoing implementation, but expansion as well. An important reason for the success of multiage classrooms has been our district's proactive work in establishing clear guidelines in each curricular area and providing professional development to staff working in this type of setting. These supports help to ensure that our core curriculum is delivered with integrity and enable teachers to capitalize on the opportunity to differentiate instruction where appropriate.

We have consistently found that multiage classrooms are an effective way to address the diverse learning needs of our students, prepare them to be successful in the 21st century and help us meet our district's mission to ensure student success while fostering lifelong learning.

Flexible Grouping Strategies in the Multiage Classroom

Jo Huffman

From Theory into Practice, Winter 2002

Excerpt: Teaching in a multiage classroom involves planning for instruction that often takes place within the structure of collaborative peer learning contexts...instruction that capitalizes on the different ages and abilities that exist in the mixed-age environment is inherent in the multiage philosophy. The flexible grouping strategies utilized by multiage classroom teachers allow opportunities for students to form small groups based on common interests and shared tasks. Peer learning takes place in structured, purposely planned instruction, as well as in less-structured situations that occur in the classroom every day as students are flexibly grouped for instruction.



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Various theoretical perspectives on peer learning explain the potential social and academic benefits for students when teachers understand these perspectives. A multiage classroom is an ideal environment for capitalizing on peer learning opportunities; in fact, a hallmark of multi-age classrooms is their collaborative environments.

Multiage Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Jo Hoffman

From the Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 2003

Abstract: This study examines the instructional and organizational practices of multiage teachers in the intermediate elementary grades and the beliefs that guide their practices. Qualitative case study design was used to construct individual portraits and a cross-case analysis of four teachers in multiage classrooms serving students in grades 3 through 5. Data collected via interviews and classroom observations revealed four categories of beliefs to be salient across the cases: differentiated instruction, social collaboration, flexible grouping and student interest. Other commonalities among the cases included team teaching, a separation by grade level for one content area, and identifying the role of the teacher as a facilitator of the learning process.

On the Merits of Multiage Classrooms

David Pratt

Research in Rural Education, 1986

This paper brings together evidence from a variety of fields which throws light on the practice of age segregation in schools. Strict age segregation is essentially a phenomenon of the last century. Research studies show no consistent benefits to age segregation, and some affective and social advantages from multi-age grouping. It is concluded that multiage and multigrade classrooms are socially and psychologically healthy environments.

Cognitive and Noncognitive Effects of Multigrade and Multi-age Classes: A Best Evidence Synthesis

Simon Veenman, 1995

Excerpt: *Multigrade* classes are classes in which students from two or more grades are taught by one teacher in one room at the same time. Students in *multigrade* classes retain their respective grade-level assignments and their respective grade-specific curricula. Such classes are generally formed for administrative and economic reasons.



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Some schools may deliberately mix both age and grade levels for educational reasons. The student is kept with the same teacher in the same class for a number of years. This practice is described as *multi-age* grouping. It is important to differentiate *multigrade* classes from multi-age classes. *Multigrade* classes are formed out of necessity; *multi-age* classes are formed deliberately for their perceived educational benefits.

Summary of Veenman's findings: Students in the *multigrade* classes do not appear to learn more or less than their counterparts in single-grade classes. No consistent differences were found with respect to reading, mathematics, language, or composite scores; students in the *multi-age* classes did not learn more or less than students in single-age classes; students in both *multigrade* and *multi-age* classes tended to score as well as or higher on attitudes towards school, personal adjustment, and self-concept than students in the single-age classes, although the differences were small.

Simply No Worse and Simply No Better May Simply Be Wrong: A Critique of Veenman's conclusion About Multigrade Classes

Mason & Burns, 1996

Excerpt: Veenman's assessment of the effects of multigrade classes – the more common of these classroom structures ignores two key factors: selection bias and lower quality instruction. The omission of these two key factors and his implicit advocacy of multi-age classes and cross-grade grouping render his no-difference conclusion problematic. Mason & Burns believe that multigrade classes have at least a small negative effect on achievement as well as potentially negative effects on teacher motivations. They suggest that researchers examine more carefully the conditions under which student achievement and affect may be fostered in the multigrade classroom structure.

Achievement of Students in Multigrade Classrooms (Evidence from the Los Angeles Unified School District)

Louis Mariano, Sheila Nataraj Kirby, June 2009

In their review of the literature they note the importance of distinguishing between multi-age and multigrade classrooms and suggest that mixed results often found in the literature on effects of such groupings on student achievement are largely attributable to inconsistent definitions of different types of multi-age and multigrade groupings.

Summary of Research on Benefits of Multiage Classrooms

From Multiage-Education

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Pavan found that students in multiage settings were more likely than their peers to have positive self-concepts; high self-esteem, and good attitudes toward school. Her review of the research also indicates that benefits to students increase the longer they are in a nongraded setting, and 'underachieving' students also benefit from being in multiage classrooms.

The Slowdown of the Multiage Classroom

From The School Administrator, March 2005

What was once a popular approach has fallen victim to NCLB demands for grade-level testing

by Priscilla Pardini

Excerpt: Multiage education, hailed as recently as 10 years ago as a promising way to restructure schools and boost student achievement, has fallen on hard times. Interest in the issue has waned, with new research on the topic virtually nonexistent and attendance at national multiage conferences a fraction of what it once was.

Schools across the country are cutting existing multiage programs, or choosing not to begin new ones. Even the state of Kentucky, which in 1990 heralded ungraded primary education as a linchpin of its sweeping school reform effort, has seen the scope of its multiage initiative reduced by half. ...

....Despite the promise multiage education seemed to offer, however, the movement has definitely lost steam. A review of the literature reveals very little now being written about — and virtually no research being done on — the subject. Grant reports that a national conference on multiage education today would likely draw only 600 or 700 people. Because no central body tracks the number of multiage classes in operation, it's impossible to quantify the decline. Yet even Stone admits, "There's no doubt that the rate of growth has slowed."

The movement's biggest blow likely came in 1998 when Kentucky relaxed its ungraded primary mandate in response to requests from teachers and administrators who wanted more flexibility in how they grouped children. Dodson says that as a result of the move, about half of Kentucky's public elementary schools have abandoned full-time multiage programs.

...More than six years after Kentucky relaxed its mandate on multiage education, about 85 percent of the primary grade classrooms in Jefferson County, Ky., remain ungraded. "We



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basically encouraged our teachers to stay with it because of the results we were getting," says Daeschner, superintendent of the 98,000-student district since 1993.

His advice to fellow superintendents interested in the practice: Make sure teachers moving into multiage classes are properly trained. "That's the caveat," he says. "If you are trained appropriately for a multiage classroom, there is an advantage for the kids. If not, they're better off in regular classes."

Children's Social Behavior in Relation to Participation in Mixed-Age or Same-Age Classrooms

Diane E. McClellan & Susan J. Kinsey

Abstract: Research on the social and cognitive effects of grouping children in mixed-age (where there is an age span of at least 2 years among children) versus same-age classrooms is gaining increasing interest among practitioners and researchers. The present investigation used a teacher rating scale, based on research into the correlates of children's social skillfulness and acceptance by other children, to assess children's social behavior in mixed- and same-age classrooms. Confounding variables such as the child's age and sex, the teacher's educational level, and classroom practices were statistically controlled. Further, a pretest of teacher ratings of kindergarten children who were later assigned to either a mixed- or same-age first-grade classroom showed no preexisting behavioral differences. Findings suggested a significant positive effect on children's prosocial behavior as a result of participation in a mixed-age classroom context. In addition, fewer children appeared to experience social isolation in mixed-age classrooms than in same-age classrooms. Aggressive behaviors were significantly less likely to be noted by teachers in mixed-age than in same-age classrooms. Follow-up ratings were taken of third-grade children, all of whom were by then enrolled in same-age classrooms. Children who had previously participated in mixed-age classrooms continued to be rated as significantly less aggressive and significantly more prosocial by their third-grade teachers. No differences were found in friendship patterns between children previously enrolled in same-age versus mixed-age classrooms.

A Thesis Presented to The Graduate Program in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of Master of Education in Administration Concordia University-Portland

2011 This research concludes that a multiage educational model can be a successful alternative to the traditional graded system, but specific consideration and attention to
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detail are vital for a successful program. The true benefit to the multiage model is in the social effects it can have on all students, specifically at-risk and minority population children. Cognitively, multiage classrooms simply are no better or worse than a graded classroom, they are merely an alternative that could potentially lead some students to success.

Multiage Instruction And Inclusion:

A Collaborative Approach (2006)

Shannon K. Stuart

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Mary Connor, Karin Cady and Alicia Zweifel, Verona Public School District

This article describes a multiage classroom led by three coteachers who facilitate the education of 42 students ages six through nine years. The classroom is located in a public school district that practices inclusion and subscribes to the principles of whole schooling. A literature review defines the concepts of coteaching, multiage education, and inclusion and demonstrates how the co-teachers practice the principles of whole schooling. A rich description of the classroom follows so that the reader may fully understand how to implement similar teaching strategies. Implications for practice are discussed.

Excerpt: In the 1990s, multiage education was hailed as a promising way to restructure schools and to boost student achievement. In the current climate of accountability, however, school districts are concerned that NCLB imposes a rigidity that curtails the use of more progressive curriculum reforms (Pardini, 2005). It is our firm belief that academic standards are here to stay. By embedding those standards into class activities and applying a planned vision of how to implement multiage groupings, standardized test scores will fall into place. Cooperative teaching helps to focus that vision.

Multi-age Education -- Time for a Change

Bonnie R. Moen

Paper for Ed. 702 - Psychological Foundations of Education

Excerpt: Now as we near the year 2000, approaches to education are again coming under the magnifying glass and nongraded or multiage classrooms are being re-evaluated with a great deal of interest. Three states have already conducted extensive research of non-gradedness and as a result have mandated that the primary schools become multiaged. Kentucky, Mississippi and Oregon have mandated multiage groupings at the primary level (Gutloff, 1995). Several other states are currently exploring the idea. Kentucky issued its



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Education Reform Act which mandated multiaged primary schools in 1990. At the time Kentucky issued the Kentucky Education Reform Act, it was dealing with failing school systems. ...

... What does the research that Kentucky and other states looked into say about multiage groupings? There seems to still be some conflicting ideas about the benefits of non-gradedness. However, most of the research does point to some very positive benefits of multiage practices if they are dealt with in the true sense of the word as pointed out in the Primary School Position Statement of Kentucky.

In Kentucky, results from the state's testing program are in after three years of the mandated multiage classrooms. The tests show that 4th graders' reading and writing scores are improving more rapidly than those of 8th and 12th graders. Of these three age groups, only the 4th graders have been legally required to be taught in multiage classrooms (Viadero, 1996). The University of Louisville's Center for Gifted Students also did a study comparing the achievement of four Kentucky primary multiage school classes with students in out-of-state traditional one-grade settings. They tried to match these classes geographically and economically. Their study found that 20% of the students in the Kentucky classrooms significantly outscored the out-of-state students on standardized tests in four areas: word identification, reading comprehension, mathematical calculation, and mathematical problem-solving (Viadero, 1996).

...While studying the research results and interviewing professionals who have dealt with multi-age classrooms, Veenman found that advocates of multiage grouping claim that it yields the following cognitive and noncognitive benefits.

1. Students have a chance to form relationships with a wider variety of children than is possible in the traditional same-age classroom. This leads to a greater sense of belonging, support, security, and confidence.
2. Teaching a diverse group of students demands individualized instruction.
3. The development of a balanced personality is promoted by fostering the attitudes and qualities that enable students to live in a complex and changing social environment.
4. The self-concepts of slower, older students are enhanced when they are asked to tutor younger students in their class.
5. More secure teacher-student relationships may be established as the student remains with the same teacher for two or more years.
6. Fewer anxieties may develop because the educational atmosphere is conducive not only to academic progress but also to social growth.



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7. Multi-age grouping provides younger students with the opportunity to observe, emulate, and imitate a wide range of behaviors; older students have the opportunity to assume responsibility for less mature and less knowledgeable students.
8. Multi-age grouping invites cooperation and other forms of prosocial behavior and thus appears to minimize competitive pressures and the need to discipline.
9. Students in the lower grade(s) can enrich their learning by attending to the material designed for higher grade(s), while the students in the higher grade(s) can profit from opportunities to review the material designed for the lower grade(s).
10. Current concepts of cognitive development (e.g. the zone of proximal development and cognitive conflict) imply that children whose knowledge or abilities are similar but not identical can stimulate each other's thinking and cognitive growth.
11. Finally, multi-age grouping relaxes the rigid curriculum with its age-graded expectations, which are inappropriate for a large number of students.

Student Achievement of 3rd-Graders in Comparable Single-Age and Multiage Classrooms.

Abstract. This study compared reading, writing, and mathematics achievement of students in comparable multiage and single-age classrooms in three different school districts. We sought links between these two types of classroom groupings and 1) gender, 2) Title I and non-Title I status, and 3) Hispanic and non-Hispanic students...We concluded that non-Title I students in multiage classrooms were achieving more highly than non-Title I students in comparable traditional single-age settings. However, the hypothesis that multiage grouping might benefit Title I students and other traditionally lower-achieving students was not borne out in this descriptive study...

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiage Classrooms in the Era of NCLB Accountability

Ruiting Song, Terry E. Spradlin, and Jonathan A. Plucker
WINTER 2009

Excerpt: The multiage program movement in the U.S. peaked in 1990, a year in which the philosophy was embraced by the Kentucky Education Reform Act (Pardini, 2005). However, in recent years, some schools have discontinued their multiage programs due to the grade-level standards and testing requirements imposed by the No Child Left Behind Act and most states' accountability laws. Although the number of these classrooms has declined recently, many educators still embrace the multiage philosophy.

.....Schools which effectively operate the multiage programs often plan ahead, introducing the programs to parents, educating teachers, and offering teachers extensive, ongoing



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professional development. Although the multiage classroom is not perfectly aligned with the current policies, many schools have implemented it and shown rapid progress by doing so in the correct way, which conforms to the multiage philosophy of a child-centered approach....Often the parents involved more in school life are the ones who promote and prefer to have their children in multiage classrooms. Thus, this situation might produce multiage classrooms full of privileged and affluent students and could cause them to become homogeneous groups, not aligned with the philosophy of multiage education programs. Teacher buy-in and preparedness are important considerations, too...For a time, multiage programs flourished in Michigan. In 1995, the Michigan Department of Education estimated that one in five districts implemented the multiage settings; three years later, more than half of the districts began or expanded upon their multiage models (Fox, 1998). However, state funding for multiage programs ceased in 1999, and a year later, the Michigan Department of Education stopped the initiative and the encouragement of multiage grouping. Although the multiage classrooms were perceived to be quite effective in helping students make progress, a reason cited for their discontinuation in Michigan was the argument that they are not compatible with grade-level content and annual testing ...Recommendations School administrators should consider multiage education as a viable "alternative" program that should be available to any student who is underserved or not succeeding in the traditional classroom. Administrators should consider multiage classrooms as a smaller learning community or a school within a school and provide these programs adequate support and leadership.

Book Resources:

Where have all the bluebirds gone? How to soar with Flexible Groupings

September, 2002; Heinemann Publishers

A practical, hands-on guidebook, which describes a variety of grouping patterns and ways to implement them throughout the elementary grades. Includes information on specific grouping patterns in reading instruction and a classroom example of the reading workshop in a multiage classroom.

Our Best Advice - The Multiage Problem Solving Handbook

Grant, Johnson & Richardson; Crystal Springs Books; New Hampshire; 1996

Excerpt: Don't confuse combination or split-grade classrooms with true multiage continuous progress classrooms. The terms of combination or split-grades because they are not philosophically based on what's best for children. The decision to create these types of
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classes is usually based on a fluctuation in enrollment and the need to reduce staff. It is strictly a financial consideration.

Multiage Q & A – 101 Practical Answers to Your Most Pressing Questions

Grant, Johnson & Richardson; Crystal Springs books; New Hampshire; 1996

Excerpt: What are the driving forces behind changing to multiage practices? ...Defined grade levels based on a normal curve means that some students must be “below grade level.” Critics of the graded structure are concerned about what the label of being below grade level does to students’ self-esteem and motivation....renewed interest in the multiage organizational structure, because of many educators’ desire to be student-centered.

The Multiage handbook – A Comprehensive Resource for Multiage Practices

Grant, Johnson & Richardson; The Society for Developmental Education; 1996

The Multiage Education Bill of Rights

By Jim Grant, 1993

1. Every student has the right to learn in a continuous progress program.
2. Every student should have the option to continue with a teacher for more than one year.
3. Every student has the right to experience continuous success in the academic, social, physical, and emotional areas.
4. Every student has the right to take the time she or he needs to learn in a multi-age classroom without the stigma of school failure.
5. Every student has the right to be free from the harmful effects of long-term ability grouping.
6. Every student has the right to learn in a program appropriate for his or her level of development.
7. Every student has the right to learn in a classroom where literacy is taught in an integrated manner.
8. Every student has the right to learn in a classroom where cooperation and conflict resolution are fostered.
9. Every student has the right to be evaluated in a manner that is consistent with how he or she was taught and measures knowledge, skills and attitudes which are meaningful.