**The Multi Age Classroom - Research**

**Will my child benefit from a multiage experience?**

Research strongly suggests that children benefit in many ways from multiage classrooms (Miller 1990). Academically, children usually do better in multiage classrooms that in traditional classrooms (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). If they don't do better, then they do the same. Multiage classrooms clearly do not negatively affect academic achievement (Miller, 1990). After reviewing twenty-one quantitative studies comparing the effects of multiage classrooms with single grade classrooms, Miller (1990, 6) notes, "In terms of academic achievement, the data clearly support the multigrade classroom as a viable and equally effective organizational alternative to single-grade instruction." In addition, the benefits for children, socially and emotionally, are consistently higher for multiage classrooms. The affective domain is greatly impacted by multiage classrooms. From his review of the research, Miller (1990, 7) notes, "When it comes to student affect, the case for multigrade organization appears much stronger, with multigrade students out-performing single-grade students in over 75 percent of the measures used." Multiage children often have a greater sense of belonging (Sherman, 1984) and more positive social relationships. Anderson and Pavan's (1993) review of research from 1977-1990 found that multiage children consistently like school more. Multiage children have more positive attitudes towards school than same-age children. The attendance rate in multiage classrooms is also significantly better than in same-age classrooms.

**Is the multiage classroom better for some children, but not for others?**

This question assumes that traditional classrooms are the best way to educate children. As you investigate the philosophy of multiage classrooms, you quickly conclude that this child-centered approach is good for all children. Shouldn't all children be able to progress at their own pace? Shouldn't all children view themselves as successful, competent learners? Shouldn't all children be able to learn from peers without competing? Shouldn't all children have the opportunity to be mentored and to mentor?

**Do older children benefit from a multiage classroom?**

In multiage classrooms, all children, even the older children, are on their own continuum of learning. The curriculum is opened up for ALL the children. The older child is able to go as far as he or she is able to go just as the younger child is. Oftentimes in a same-grade classroom, some children who have accomplished the curriculum, stagnate or get bored with learning things they already know. This does not happen in the multiage program. The older child is able to progress beyond the traditional curriculum limits. Older children also benefit socially and emotionally. Older children have the opportunity to mentor younger children. This allows all the older children to gain confidence and increase their self-esteem. Without the strong competitions of same-age classrooms, older children are free to cooperate and help others. Do gifted children benefit from multiage classrooms? Yes, gifted children benefit from multiage classrooms in much the same way that older children benefit. Gifted children are also on their own continuum of learning. They are not held back by a prescribed grade-level curriculum. The open-ended curriculum in a multiage classroom encourages children to explore, discover, and invent. Gifted children, as do all children, have the freedom to pursue their interests and the opportunity to creatively expand their knowledge.

**What happens if my child goes from a multiage classroom to a traditional graded classroom as a transfer?**

Sometimes families move and the student must be relocated to another school that does not provide multiage classrooms. Experience has shown that children who are in multiage classrooms are more confident learners and quickly adapt to same-age classrooms. One positive aspect is that they have had time to enjoy seeing themselves as competent learners. To have had some time in a multiage classroom is better than none at all.

http://www.theexpeditionschool.com/about-2/multiage-classrooms/

## **Advantages of Multiage Classrooms**

### Leadership Opportunities

Often parents worry that the younger children in the classroom will distract the teachers and take attention away from the older children. This is not the case. Older children benefit from the ability to lead younger children. Leading, whether in guiding a new student or giving a bit of attention to a younger student who may be having a difficult time away from his parents, is a critical experience for a young child. These “soft” skills are vital in emotional and social development of the child.

### Academic Opportunities

Many parents worry that if their child is the oldest in the classroom then he will not be challenged academically. In multiage classrooms, teachers engage older children to “give” lessons to younger children. Younger children are encouraged to observe the older child’s more advanced work.  Older children benefit from the ability to teach. Teaching ingrains a concept.

Older children model more sophisticated, complex problem solving and critical thinking. So, younger children are able to develop skills without the guidance of an adult teacher. In other words, if it weren’t for the older child, the younger child would most likely have to seek, or rely on, the adult. So, the younger child develops independence and feels secure about his capabilities.

### Same Teacher, Same Classroom

The child and her teacher are able to truly get to know and to trust one another over the years. The child becomes intimately familiar with the environment, and begins to understand himself as a learner and as a person of the world.  The classroom community is strong and family like in the children and teachers supporting and caring for one another.

### Child Develops at his Own Pace

The “five year old” who isn’t reading yet is not labelled as “behind” in a multiage classroom. He is able to develop at his own pace and within the range of typical development (3 to 6 years old for language, for example) without feeling inadequate.  The child has years to develop, rather than a shorter amount of time under loads of pressure, thereby allowing the child to progress and succeed according to his ability. The child sees himself as a unique individual able to learn as he needs to learn.

### Child Led Learning Environment

A child in a multiage classroom is able to develop over time within a supportive community according to his ability. As a result, he is able to lead his own learning. He is able to take control of his learning, to own it. The result is a lifelong love of learning. The child discovers reading, writing, math, science, geography, and so on on his own. That is powerful.

<http://carrotsareorange.com/advantages-of-multiage-classrooms/>

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

1. Will the oldest age group in the multiage class get behind their peers in a single grade class?

Multiage teachers focus instruction on students’ learning needs rather than on grade-level curriculum. The teacher’s attention is not divided between the age groups (as in some multi-grade classes). Therefore, students have the advantage of continuous learning, and in some cases will be ahead of their peers in a single grade class.

1. Will the high achieving (and gifted) older student receive enough challenge in a multiage class?

The learning environment of a multiage class is ideal for high achieving students. Instruction is customized to student’s stages of learning, rather than being confined to a grade-level set of outcomes. Curriculum is presented through in-depth topics, allowing students to explore specific aspects that interest them. Students with independent work habits are given some freedom to develop individual and group projects during class time. Older children are given ample opportunity for leadership roles.

1. Will some of the younger children be intimidated by their older classmates?

One of the interesting observations made by staff at Port Williams Elementary is that the young children in multiage classes did not fear their older classmates. When the children had the opportunity to get to know older children in the safe environment of their classroom, they developed more open, trusting interaction with them. The older children often took on a role of ‘protector’ and mentor.

1. Isn’t it better for students to have a different teacher each year?

The benefits of continuing with the same teacher a second or third year outweigh the advantages of changing teachers each year. The better a teacher knows a student, the easier it is for the teacher to provide appropriate instruction. Students can continue a second year using the same routines and expectations established with their same teacher. It is less stressful for the teacher, student and parent to work together when they have had the opportunity to get to know each other for longer than one year.

1. What happens if the student and teacher do not get along?

In the case of larger schools, where there are class options for age groups of students, it is possible for students to transfer to another class, rather than remain with the same teacher for a second year. However, this decision would not be made until considerable effort was made to reconcile the differences. There may be no choice of other class placements in small schools. The ideal goal is that the student, teacher and parent develop a workable relationship based on mutual respect and integrity.

1. How will children be prepared for a competitive world?

Being prepared for competition has to do with a person’s self-efficacy. When children believe that they are competent, they are better equipped to face competition. In a nurturing learning environment such as multiage, competition is not imposed; but is offered as challenges for students to choose (when they feel ready). Through experiences of hard work and successful challenges, children can develop a positive perception about their ability to reach a goal.

1. Will multiage students end up with gaps in the curriculum?

When student learning is being monitored by one teacher over a number of years, it is less likely that they will end up with gaps in their conceptual and skill development. Content topics in curriculum guides are addressed over a span of years included in the multiage grouping. Over this span of years, students in multiage classes will cover the same topics as their peers in single grades.

1. Will the children be doing work at other grade levels or just their own?

Multiage teachers constantly monitor the instructional needs of the students. The intention of the teacher is to engage students in activities so that they will experience success with an appropriate level of challenge. Sometimes, this takes the form of open-ended activities, which can be explored in different levels of depth, quality, and complexity. On the outside, this may appear that all the students are “doing the same work”. Sometimes, the teacher pulls together a small group of students of similar achievement level for explicit instruction in a specific area regardless of their age. Sometimes the students are working independently, making choices from a menu that clearly indicates level of difficulty.

1. What are some of the difficulties of implementing multiage education?

The biggest challenge to multiage implementation is the misunderstanding about ‘what it is and is not’. Not all teachers and administrators have had an opportunity or reason to learn about multiage education and neither have most people in the parent community. For many, when you talk about multiage, they are picturing split class in their minds.

For more than a century, most schools in North America have used a structure of same-age grades. This has led to an assumption that children of particular ages should be learning specific things at the same rate and in the same way. If not, they are labeled different than the norm.

Some schools rush implementation because of administrative expediency. Situations such as a shortage in teachers or a shift in demographics, may force a school to combine grades. Learning about this change a few weeks or months prior to implementation hardly gives enough time for teachers and parents to prepare for acceptance and understanding of a multiage approach.

Setting up and managing a multiage class requires extra work initially for the teacher. It is crucial that the teacher be willing to explore foundational learning theory that supports multiage education in order to develop compatible ideology and pedagogy. The teacher will need to re-configure the curriculum into manageable class topics in order to be accountable to the regional school system. Both of these pursuits take substantial effort and time and ideally would have at least a year before implementation takes place. Unfortunately, teachers are not always given a choice in taking a multiage class. All too often, it is the inexperienced teacher who ends up with the mixed-age class, and can be overwhelmed by learning basic teaching strategies as well as planning an extensive curriculum.

The increased pressure of accountability and standardized testing makes many teachers reluctant to consider a way of teaching other than “covering the curriculum”. Ideally, a school community could take the pressure off teachers by supporting alternative curriculum delivery, focusing on their child’s learning progress (rather than standardized scores), and appreciating the benefits of the multiage program. Parents and educators could engage in discussions that revolve around the goals they want in education for the children, and whether multiage education can achieve these goals.

http://www.choosingmultiage.com/faq.php