

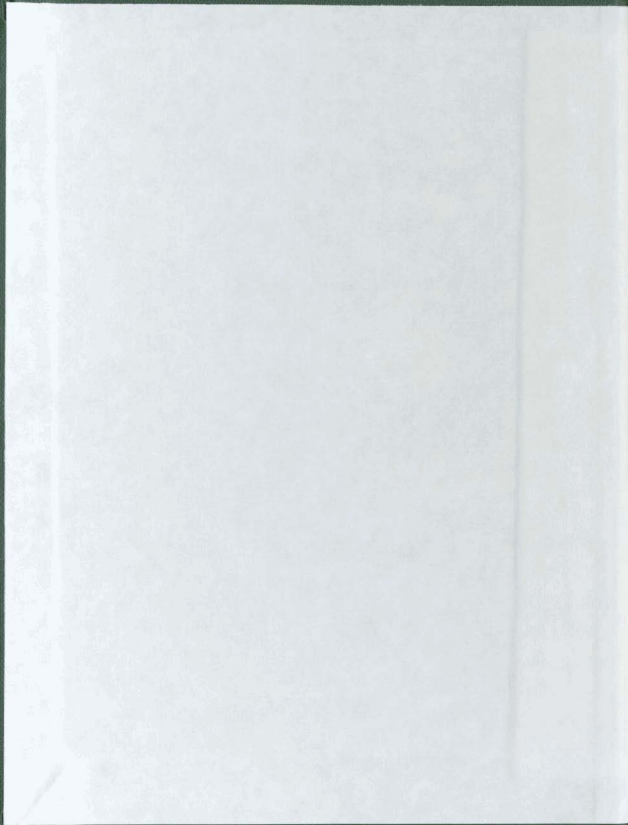
SUCCESSFUL MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS -
THEN AND NOW

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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ELIZABETH J. ELDER



**SUCCESSFUL MULTI-AGE PROGRAMS --
THEN AND NOW**

by

Elizabeth J. Elder, B.Ed, B.A

A project submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

School District #3 sees multi-age classroom grouping as an excellent learning environment. During the 1999-2000 school year, in response to a need expressed by both schools and the School Board to develop policies on multi-age education, School District #3 established a committee which was charged with the task of drafting policies, guidelines, and procedures for multi-age classrooms in the District. This project is contributing to the goals of that committee by providing a concise, informative resource on multi-age education: thus, particular attention has been given to supporting the practices and policies developed by the District committee. The project's primary audience is teachers in the schools that are establishing multi-age education programs. The data for this project were collected through four primary sources: a comprehensive review of research on multi-age education, document analysis, surveys, and observations and the personal experiences of the author. The surveys were developed and executed to supplement research findings and the author's knowledge gained from teaching experience in a multi-age setting. The results confirm research findings that multi-age education is advantageous to students and provide practical information concerning practices used in the set-up and execution of multi-age education programs. This information was used in compiling *The Establishment of Multi-age Education – Then and Now*, a resource from which teachers may glean ideas to modify and further develop multi-age programs to meet the needs of their students.

Acknowledgments

For their assistance and support in the completion of this project I extend my sincere thanks to the following individuals:

- Dr. Jean Brown, my supervisor.
- the following personnel from School District #3: Dr. Tony Genge, Mr. David Quick, Ms. Betty King, and Ms. Renee Sherstobetoff.
- the teachers, principals, and parents who responded to the surveys conducted.
- Ms. Marie Hatcher, a fellow graduate student.
- Ms. Brenda Janes for her word processing skills.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to

my parents

Margaret and David Elder

for their inspiration.

encouragement and support

and to

Brad Musseau

for his patience and support.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Purpose	2
Background	3
Transferability	6
Definition of Terms	7
Design of the Study	7
Document Analysis	8
Surveys	8
Participant - Observer	9
Limitations/Delimitations of the Study	10
Organization of the Project Description	11
Criteria for Project Evaluation	11
Chapter 2 Project Design and Survey Results	13
The Survey Sample	13
Data Collection and Analysis	14
Survey Results	16
The Principals' Responses	16
The Teachers' Responses	17
The Parents' Responses	18
Summary	21
Chapter 3 Review of the Literature	22
History of Multi-age Education	22
Early Multi-age Groupings	23
The Graded System	24
The Influence of John Dewey	25
The Influence of Maria Montessori	26
The One-Room School	28
The Family Grouping Model	28
The Influence of John Goodlad and Robert Anderson	29
The Detroit Program	32
The Canadian Scene	32

Table of Contents

The Present	36
Research and Learning Theories Support Multi-age Education	38
Multi-age Models Compared to Traditional Unit-aged Models	38
The Work of Piaget and Vygotsky	40
Benefits For the Older Students	42
The Risk of Bullying	43
Age Related Hierarchies	44
Summary	45
Chapter 4 The Establishment of Multi-age Education –Then And Now (A Handbook for Teachers in Multi-age Classrooms)	47
Project Cover Page	48
Preface	49
Table of Contents	51
Introduction	53
Multi-age Education in School District #3	59
Section One: The Evolution of Multi-age Education – Significant Events and Educators	62
Early Multi-age Groupings	64
The Graded System	66
The Influence of John Dewey	69
The Influence of Maria Montessori	70
The One-Room School	73
The Family Grouping Model	74
The Influence of John Goodlad and Robert Anderson	75
The Canadian Scene	78
The Present	83
Section Two: Getting Started: Commonly Asked Questions About Multi-age Education	87
Question One: Is multi-age education for all students?	88
Question Two: Do special education students and special education teachers have a place in multi-age classrooms?	91
Question Three: Who should teach multi-age classes?	94
Question Four: Will I have to change my teaching methods?	96
Question Five: How can I become more familiar with multi-age education?	98
Question Six: Is it better to start teaching two grade levels rather than three grade levels?	100

Table of Contents

Question Seven:	Who should be involved when planning the initial set-up?	102	
Question Eight:	What pitfalls might be encountered?	105	
Question Nine:	What is the role of specialist teachers working with a multi-age class?	108	
Section Three: The Importance of Communicating the Concept of Multi-age Continuous Progress Education			112
	Misconceptions About Multi-age Education	113	
	Communicating the Concept to Parents	116	
	Communicating the Concept to and Amongst Staff Members	122	
Conclusion			125
References			128
Appendix 1: Questionnaire: How strong is the support system in your school?			131
Chapter 5 Summary And Conclusions			133
	Discussion of Findings	133	
	Implications for Practice	134	
	Implications for Further Research	134	
	Concluding Comments	135	
References			136
Appendix A: Graduate Studies Project Guidelines			139
Appendix B: Policies, Guidelines and Procedure from School District #3's Multi-age Education Policy Handbook (draft)			145
Appendix C: Surveys			154

List of Tables

Table 1: Survey Items Concerning Multi-age Education	15
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Chapter 1

Introduction

For centuries educators have grappled with the question of how best to educate students. Many factors must be considered when addressing this question. A particularly important factor, especially in North American education, is that of how to group students to maximize their learning. Should students of similar abilities be grouped together or should students of mixed abilities be grouped together? Should students of the same age be grouped together or should students of mixed-ages be grouped together? The introduction of the graded system during the 1840's aroused much debate on the latter question. Goodlad and Anderson, two very prominent educators in the nongraded movement during the second half of the twentieth century, make an interesting analogy between the graded system and Procrustes, a character from Greek mythology. They explain that:

Greek mythology tells us of the cruel robber, Procrustes (the Stretcher). When travellers sought his house for shelter, they were tied onto an iron bedstead. If the traveller was shorter than the bed, Procrustes stretched him out until he was the same length as the bed. If he was longer, his limbs were chopped off to make him fit. Procrustes shaped both short and tall until they were equally long and equally dead. (Goodlad & Anderson, 1963, p. 1)

Goodlad and Anderson (1963) continue to explain that:

Certain time-honored practices of pupil classification, while perhaps not lethal, trap school-age travellers in much the same fashion as Procrustes' bed trapped the unwary. These practices are concomitants of our graded system of school organization. First, a certain amount of progress is held to be standard for a year's work. Then the content of the work is laid out within the grade, to be 'covered' and, to a degree, 'mastered'. The slow are pulled and stretched to fit the grade. Sometimes because their God-given limbs lack enough elasticity, they are nonpromoted' - left behind.

where presumably another year of stretching will do the trick. The quick are compressed and contracted to fit the grade. In time, they learn to adapt to a pace that is slower than their natural one. (p. 1)

Although some educators may agree with the analogy that Goodlad and Anderson make, the fact remains that Newfoundland's current education system is predominately graded. Time brings changes and the rigid teaching practices of the graded classroom have evolved. Some of the current trends in education that are characteristic of the multi-age setting are also found in single grade classrooms. Nevertheless, as Daniel and Terry (1995) state:

There will still be real pressure on Johnny to pass. Writers won't be helping emergent writers. Readers won't be helping emergent readers. Brothers and sisters won't be helping siblings and "old" students won't be helping new students to become more familiar with a new environment and new processes. Children won't have the opportunity to learn and develop at their own rates without the ever-present concern about passing a given grade. (p. 9)

Purpose

There is a dual purpose for this project. First, this project was undertaken to be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education. A detailed explanation of what constitutes a project according to the School of Graduate studies can be seen in Appendix A.

Second, this project was undertaken to provide School District #3 with a handbook for their teachers which would provide:

- an historical overview of the evolution of multi-age education
- answers to commonly asked questions about multi-age education

- ways of communicating the concept of multi-age education to all stakeholders

School District #3 wanted a teacher-friendly document which would assist teachers in the Board who are beginning to adopt a multi-age education pedagogy. The handbook developed for this project is intended to supplement existing information which is presently available from District Office.

Background

Considering that School District #3 is the educational setting for which this project was developed, particular attention has been given to supporting the practices and policies that are under development by District #3 for multi-age classrooms in its jurisdiction.

Caution was taken to ensure that the needs of District #3, which first implemented multi-age education under the former Western Integrated School Board in 1989, were addressed in compiling the handbook for this project. Continuous communication was maintained between me, as the developer of the handbook, and School District #3 personnel, to ensure that the District would be satisfied with the end product.

The District was interested in having me produce the handbook as I had personally experienced the initial implementation of multi-age education in my school. During the first year of implementation, a team of teachers met regularly to share ideas and to plan instructional units for their multi-age classes. This team included me and a follow teacher on staff who had completed extensive graduate work in the field of multi-age education and had experience teaching in the multi-age setting. Our classrooms were

side by side which added convenience to our collaborative working relationship. Our working relationship was well established prior to the year that multi-age education was introduced in the primary grades at our school. One year prior to this, my colleague had been transferred to my school and we had collaborated extensively while teaching single grade one classes. Through the many planning sessions and conversations we conducted during that period, the concept of multi-age education gradually became a more familiar one. This collaborative effort continued as multi-age classes were established in our school and eventually expanded to include another multi-age teacher from a nearby school. Both of these working colleagues were involved in the initial implementation of multi-age education within School District #3.

In addition to having this hands-on experience, my graduate program focussed on multi-age education whenever possible. Writing a Review of the Literature furthered my knowledge of multi-age education. Developing the handbook for teachers allowed me to combine ideas from this variety of sources.

It is noteworthy that School District #3 views multi-age classroom grouping as an excellent learning environment. The District has not mandated multi-age classroom grouping, but certainly has provided encouragement and support to schools and teachers wishing to offer it as an option to parents and to schools where declining enrollments dictate combining more than one grade in a class. During the 1999-2000 school year, in a response to a need expressed by schools and the School Board to develop policies on multi-age education, School District #3 established a committee which was charged with the task of drafting policies, guidelines, and procedures for multi-age classrooms in the

District. This work was completed in draft form at the end of the 1999-2000 school year (see Appendix B for Policies, Guidelines and Procedures from School District #3's Multi-age Education Policy Handbook draft). As of this writing, it has yet to be presented to and approved by the School Board for District #3.

As partial fulfilment of the requirements to obtain a Master of Education degree, and to complement the work of the committee, I agreed to undertake as a project the task of developing a handbook for teachers which would add to the resources currently available. At the same time, another graduate student, Marie Hatcher, agreed to develop a second separate handbook which would focus on effective practices and strategies for multi-age classrooms. Both projects were meant to contribute to the goals of the committee since they provide multi-age teachers with relevant information about current practices in the establishment and execution of multi-age classrooms. They also support the policy handbook which was drafted by the committee.

To develop the two handbooks so that they met the needs of existing teachers, the Director of the School Board agreed to a survey of multi-age education in the District. It was also agreed that the survey would elicit the information needed for both handbooks, rather than have the same teachers surveyed twice. Three surveys were developed: one for principals whose schools offer multi-age education, one for multi-age teachers and one for parents of children in multi-age classes (see Appendix C). During the 1999-2000 school year, the surveys were sent to four schools in the local Corner Brook area who were using multi-age pedagogy. Results from the surveys, which reveal the respondents'

views on multi-age education and current practices used by principals and teachers involved in multi-age education, were incorporated as needed in both handbooks.

In addition to conducting the aforementioned surveys, documents pertaining to instruction produced by the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador (i.e., *The Primary/Elementary Levels Handbook (Draft)* and *Learning to Learn*) and School District #3 (i.e., *Multi-age Continuous Progress Education Information For Parents* and the *Multi-age Education Policy Handbook (draft)*) were examined. Regardless of any changes to the draft documents, the practical information in the handbook developed for this project still will be of benefit to teachers who are teaching in multi-age classrooms in District #3. There was also a comprehensive review of the research on multi-age education. The two research questions which guided this review were:

1. What is the history behind multi-age education?
2. What steps need to be taken to successfully establish multi-age education programs?

Transferability

Classroom teachers in multi-age settings in School District #3 are the intended users of this project. These teachers have access to a growing collection of resources on multi-age education and a program specialist with extensive expertise in this area. They will also be teaching in a school district in which there has been use of multi-age pedagogy since 1989. Therefore, there are a number of teachers with extensive experience they may draw upon. Since the Handbook developed for this project assumes

such users. It may have limited use in other school districts that lack such experience, expertise and resources.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this project School District #3's definition of multi-age grouping is used. It is defined in the *Multi-age Education Policy Handbook (draft)* as follows:

Multi-age Continuous Progress Education: "is a classroom organizational structure in which children of two or more age levels work together. In their everyday lives, children interact with people of all ages. Their lives are enriched by the many experiences they have and by the relationships they develop. Multi-age education is a natural and logical extension of children's home environments. Multi-age education is based on a belief that children will benefit from a learning environment that values diversity. In a classroom in which there is a wide range of ability, children's contributions to classroom life strengthen both their academic and social experiences. (p. 2)

Design of the Study

This is a collaborative project, which meets the criteria established by Calhoun (1994) as action research which "captures the notion of focussed efforts to improve the quality of the organization and its performance (thus, 'action')" (p.7). The first collaboration was with District #3's Primary Program Specialist (now retired) who supported and validated the need in the Board for additional resources for multi-age teachers. The Assistant Director of Programs for District #3 approved the development of *The Establishment of Multi-age Education -- Then and Now*, yet also wanted a committee set up to draft a policy handbook regarding multi-age education for District #3. The committee worked separately preparing the *Multi-age Education Policy Handbook*

(draft), yet insurances had to be made that the Board policies were supported in this project. The Program Specialist K-4, Multi-age Continuous Progress acted as a liaison between me and the committee. The following four sources were used to collect data for this project: a comprehensive review of research on multi-age education, document analysis, surveys, and participant observations and personal experiences as a multi-age teacher.

Document Analysis

The *Primary/Elementary Handbook (Draft)* and *Learning to Learn* documents pertaining to instruction, produced by the Department for Newfoundland and Labrador, were examined. The *Multi-age Education Policy Handbook (draft)* for District #3 was also examined. Cheryl Fox's evaluation and self-assessment tool entitled *School Program Study Guide ... The Multi-age Classroom A Self Study Instrument For Schools* and District #3's information pamphlet for parents entitled *Multi-age Continuous Progress Education Information for Parents* were examined and used in the development of surveys for principals, teachers and parents.

Surveys

Through collaboration with another graduate student, surveys for principals, teachers and parents involved in multi-age education were developed. The purpose for conducting these surveys was to determine the opinions of principals, teachers and parents involved in multi-age education in District #3 and to learn of the practices in place in local schools which had already established multi-age programs. The surveys in Appendix C were developed from Cheryl Fox's *School Program Study Guide ... The*

Multi-age Classroom A Self Study Instrument For Schools and an information pamphlet which had been developed by District #3 entitled *Multi-age Continuous Progress Education - Information for Parents*. Upon request of the committee charged with the task of drafting a policy handbook, the surveys which were developed are included in the *Multi-age Education Policy Handbook (draft)* for School District #3.

The Director of District #3, permitted the execution of the surveys. Thus, during the Spring 2000 the surveys were sent to four schools in the immediate Corner Brook area where multi-age classrooms had been established. The surveys were sent to only four schools rather than all schools in District #3 to help ensure they were completed by participants involved with authentic multi-age classrooms. Information gleaned from these surveys was incorporated when needed into this project and into the project developed by the other graduate student.

Participant - Observer

Although not at present teaching in a multi-age setting, during the 1997-98 and the 1998-99 school years, I taught in a multi-age classroom with students ranging in age from six to seven, covering the outcomes designed for grades one to two. I chose this role over the role of a multi-grade teacher when I was given a class made up of six and seven year old children and asked which approach I preferred.

My knowledge of multi-age education was based on many conversations with a fellow teacher who had experience teaching in a multi-age setting and had completed her graduate work in this area. As well, I was able to reflect on and debate the merit of the topic of multi-age education while completing a graduate course during the summer of

1997. During my two years as a multi-age teacher, I worked closely with fellow teachers who were experienced multi-age teachers. Therefore, after much study, reflection and experience, I view multi-age pedagogy as sound and bring this understanding to this project.

Limitations/Delimitations of the Study

The handbook, *The Establishment of Multi-age Education – Then and Now*, is intended to supplement District #3's growing collection of varied resources among which research literature and videos are included. It is not meant to be used as a stand alone document. Its focus is limited to presenting teachers with information upon which they can build when establishing multi-age education programs. It is acknowledged that this field will be expanding, and that teachers will need to be continuously learning if they wish to be current in this pedagogy.

Since District #3 was the client for whom the self-contained handbook in Chapter 4 was written, their established criteria had to be met. It is important to acknowledge that the District did not want this project to:

- critically analyse the developer's perspective or challenge taken for granted assumptions about multi-age education for the purpose of comparing multi-age classes to single grade classes
- critique School District #3's Multi-age Education Policy handbook (see Appendix B)
- address administrative issues such as staffing implications and teacher evaluation

- address special education issues such as classroom scheduling with implications for both special education and multi-age teachers and students alike

Organization of the Project Description

Chapter 1 gives a brief description of the study including its purpose, background information, transferability, definition of terms, design of the study, limitations, and outlines the organization of the project. Chapter 2 describes the design of the research study. It includes the results of the surveys executed. Chapter 3 reviews the research literature related to this study. It outlines the history behind multi-age education and presents learning theories and research which support multi-age continuous progress education. Chapter 4 is the handbook which was developed for this project. Since it is designed for teacher use, its style and presentation differ from the first three chapters. When presented to School District #3 it will be in binder format. Chapter 5 contains a brief summary of the project and discussion of the findings.

Criteria for Project Evaluation

To complete my Master of Education program in a way that would provide maximum learning opportunities, I chose the project route (see Appendix A for description of a project). The project required me to submit the completed resource, namely a handbook created specifically for School District #3, as well as a report.

This report should be evaluated not as a thesis but rather as a written account of research used to create the final product which is the handbook. To be judged successful, it must meet the requirements stipulated by the District. The report is not intended.

therefore, to be a comprehensive discussion of multi-age education such as would be found in a thesis. Instead, it is the conceptual framework drawn upon to produce the Handbook. Although it is comprehensive in the topic areas it covers, it is limited to the topics to be covered within the Handbook which was consequently developed.

Chapter 2

Project Design and Survey Results

The principle type of research used in completion of this project was literature review and survey research. The literature review provided the overview of multi-age education, its development and the pertinent information required by educators endeavouring to establish multi-age classes in their schools. The information in the handbook is presented as a resource for teachers interested in the establishment of multi-age education classes.

There was an identified need in School District #3 for a resource which could be used by educators wanting to establish multi-age education programs. As part of the project, and with the cooperation and involvement of the School District: principals, teachers and parents involved in multi-age education in the immediate Corner Brook area were surveyed. Information gathered by the survey was used in the preparation of the handbook. Recognizing that meeting the needs of teachers in such an area is an ongoing process, this handbook project provides a foundation and gives guidelines for directions to follow when setting up multi-age education programs. In recognition of the changing needs of teachers and students, constant revision will be necessary. Thus, the handbook is intended to be used as a resource that provides a foundation on which educators can build when establishing multi-age education programs.

The Survey Sample

Four schools offering multi-age education classes during the 1999-2000 school year in the immediate Corner Brook area were selected as survey settings. These four were selected rather than all schools in District #3 since it was important to ensure that

the surveys were completed by participants involved with authentic multi-age classrooms. Surveys were sent to the principal of each school, and also given to each teacher in each school who was currently teaching in a multi-age setting. Each teacher was asked to randomly choose three parents to whom to give a copy of the Survey for Parents.

The highest response to the surveys came from the principals. Three out of four of the principals surveyed completed and returned their survey. Five of the eleven teachers surveyed completed and returned their survey and fifteen of the thirty-three parent surveys were completed and returned. Since each teacher was asked to randomly select three parents to whom to give a survey, it is probable that only the five teachers who completed the survey themselves distributed the surveys to parents. The lack of response may be contributed to the timing of the surveys which were administered late in the spring 2001.

Data Collection and Analysis

As an experienced teacher of a multi-age class in a school which had, unofficially, been deemed a 'Centre for Multi-age Education', I brought observations and insights on multi-age education. That knowledge base was broadened by the literature review. The literature review and document analysis, plus my own insights allowed me to develop the surveys, using Fox's evaluation and self-assessment tool entitled *School Program Study Guide ... The Multi-age Classroom A Self Study Instrument For Schools* which were sent to principals, teachers and parents involved in multi-age education in District #3. These surveys were jointly developed and executed with my fellow graduate student working on the second project for District #3.

The surveys for principals, teachers, and parents sought different information.

The survey for principals focussed on procedures for initial set-up of multi-age programs.

The survey for teachers mainly focussed on the changes that occur to teaching practices when teachers switch from teaching a single grade class to teaching a multi-age class.

The survey for parents focussed on the parents' perspectives on multi-age education once their children have been part of a multi-age class.

While the surveys for each group were different, all began in the same manner by asking the respondent to complete the following table by indicating if they view these characteristics of multi-age classrooms as advantages or disadvantages. Space was provided for respondents to include additional advantages or disadvantages.

Table 1

Survey Items Concerning Multi-age Education

	Advantage	Disadvantage
Children of different ages and abilities learn together.		
Children stay with the same teacher for more than one year.		
Children are familiar with the routines of the classroom at the beginning of a new school year.		
Siblings are encouraged to learn together in the same classroom.		
Because grade level boundaries are blurred, children's learning is not confined to grade level expectations.		
In the second or third year of a multi-age classroom, children have opportunities to be leaders and mentors		
	Additional Advantages	Additional Disadvantages

Survey Results

As with the data collection techniques used in this study, the results of the surveys of principals, teachers and parents are presented separately here. However, when taken together, we get a more complete understanding of the perceptions of multi-age classrooms.

The Principals' Responses

All three of the principals are very supportive of multi-age education. All view the characteristics of multi-age continuous classrooms which were listed on each of the surveys developed as being advantageous to student learning. One principal views it as advantageous that multi-age classes ensure more focus on curriculum outcomes than reliance on textbooks. Another principal stated as an additional advantage that the students in multi-age classes display a greater tolerance for differences and are more cooperative. There was only one disadvantage stated on the surveys received from the principals: that is, it is disadvantageous to students who leave the school before they complete the program, especially if those students have not been given the opportunity to be amongst the oldest in the class.

When questioned why their schools decided to implement multi-age classes, one principal responded that "multi-age classes have certain advantages and the element of choice should be available for parents." Another principal stated that the school decided to implement it simply because they liked the philosophy behind it. Two of the principals who responded also mentioned that multi-age classes help to "address the 'numbers' crunch", but that they see a broader value in multi-age grouping.

The Teachers' Responses

As did the principals surveyed, the teachers who responded also indicated that they view the characteristics of multi-age continuous progress classrooms as being advantageous to student learning. Two out of five teacher respondents added as an additional advantage that each September they were already familiar with about half of their students. One out of five listed an additional advantage as being the fact that teaching in a multi-age class requires teachers to be familiar with a broad range of outcomes, rather than just one grade level. The respondents to the teacher survey conducted indicated that teachers continue to use most of their methods to the same degree or more often when they change from being a single grade classroom teacher to a multi-age classroom teacher. None suddenly began to employ completely new methods. This finding is discussed in the section, "Will I have to change my teaching methods?" in the handbook developed for this project.

Teachers who responded to the survey gave the following suggestions for teachers who are considering teaching a multi-age class:

- talk with teachers, students and parents involved in multi-age education programs
- visit a multi-age class that is already in progress
- remember that "the role of any teacher is to take each individual child from where they are to as far as they can go in all areas"

The following are activities which teachers who responded to the survey find particularly successful in their classes:

- creating the daily agenda with the students
- giving children responsibilities
- having sharing time during class meetings
- having a "Reading Chair" where one student per day sits to read a book to the class

The teachers surveyed also indicated that there had been a multi-age chat group which previously had met once a month, but currently there is no multi-age support group organized in the immediate Corner Brook area.

The Parents' Responses

Fourteen out of fifteen of the parents surveyed viewed the following four characteristics of multi-age continuous progress classrooms listed on each of the surveys developed as advantages:

1. Children of different ages and abilities learn together.
2. Children stay with the same teacher for more than one year.
3. Children are familiar with the routines of the classroom at the beginning of a new school year.
4. Because grade levels are blurred, children's learning is not confined to grade level expectations.

Ten out of fifteen view the fact that siblings are encouraged to learn together in the same classroom as an advantage. All of the parents who responded view it as an advantage that in the second or third year of a multi-age classroom, children have the

opportunities to be leaders and mentors. The following are additional advantages described by some parent respondents:

- more time is taken with children who are not at their grade level
- relaxed atmosphere
- usually a smaller class

The following are described as disadvantages by some parent respondents:

- the older children do see some repetition in curriculum
- two years is the maximum a child should have a teacher because they become very attached to them
- individual desks are not used: children sitting at tables with five children per table cause problems with children not paying attention
- students in multi-age classes cannot go out for help: the teacher is expected to give the extra help and most of the time they do not have time to do it

Parents indicated the following reasons for their decision to put their child in a multi-age class:

- children knew the teacher
- there is small class size
- children are introduced early to concepts above parental expectations
- older children develop their leadership skills
- older students can help the younger ones when needed.
- the student had already met with success in a multi-age class.

- students learn at their own pace and can go ahead of their grade level in areas where they excel
- it is challenging for the children
- a relaxed atmosphere is observed in multi-age classrooms
- their child would have the same teacher for more than one year
- one parent had no choice when they relocated

Of the parents who responded to the survey eight out of fifteen said that they would prefer to keep their child in a multi-age class; four out of fifteen said they would prefer not to keep their child in a multi-age class; and three out of fifteen were undecided.

The following are suggestions from parents for schools that are considering setting up a multi-age class:

- class size must be kept small
- teachers assigned to teach a multi-age class should be supportive of multi-aging
- parents need to have an orientation to multi-age education
- care needs to be taken to ensure that the teacher assigned to teach the multi-age class will remain in this position rather than often changing teachers
- when class size is set, it should be kept; not added to
- children should not be randomly selected
- multi-age must be supported for the benefit of the students, not for teacher allocation

- teachers assigned to teach multi-age classes must have training in this area

Summary

The research findings from the review of the research literature, survey results, and knowledge gained from personal observations and experience as a multi-age teacher are the foundation of the Handbook developed for this project. All of these sources confirm that multi-age education (previously known as nongraded education) does indeed have a group of supporters.

Chapter 3

Review of the Literature

As the title of the handbook indicates, this project is concerned with a historical look at the establishment of multi-age education and also at how multi-age classes are being established currently. Therefore, an extensive review of research literature related to the establishment of multi-age education was conducted. In the review of the literature, however, the term nongraded is often used when examining the history of multi-age education since multi-age builds on the nongraded movement.

In section one of the review of the literature the history of the nongraded classroom and the evolution of multi-age education will be examined. Section two will examine if learning theories and research support multi-age education.

History of Multi-age Education

Examining the history of multi-age education entails a number of themes. This chapter will address the following major themes:

- Early Multi-age Groupings
- The Graded System
- The Influence of John Dewey
- The Influence of Maria Montessori
- The One-Room School
- The Family Grouping Model
- The Influence of John Goodlad and Robert Anderson
- The Detroit Program
- The Canadian Scene

- The Present

Early Multi-age Groupings

Classes compiled of students of various ages have existed since the beginning of the educational system. While this may be the only characteristic they have in common with what is defined as a multi-age class today, in examining the history of education it becomes evident that the benefits of multi-age groupings have been recognized by many famous educators. It is important to keep in mind that the graded system was not implemented until the mid 1800s. Chase & Doan (1994), citing Patrick Shannon's work (1990), summarize how multi-age groupings have long existed in which was seen as progressive schools:

Comenius suggested multi-age groupings so that 'one pupil serves as an example and a stimulus for another' (p. 22). Shannon also documents the ideals and histories of progressive schools based on the multi-age concepts, which works for children and adults alike. Among the progressive schools he describes are the Quincy Schools of the 1870s, in which individuality was the system; the Moonlight Schools in Kentucky, where students served as instructors under the slogan, 'Each one teach one'; and the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, where staff members were instructed to teach by demonstrating their capacity to learn.. (p. 4)

According to Moen (n. d.) the history of multi-age education goes back to ancient times:

The early Jews developed schools for boys from ages six to thirteen and taught them in the synagogues. In ancient Greece, young boys, age 7-18 were brought together to receive physical and mental training. In medieval trade guilds, students studied with their teachers until they were ready to be on their own. Some would finish their apprenticeship soon; others might take a longer time. Each was considered as good as the artisan who had taught him. In the monasteries of the 1500s, 'a sixteen year old and a six year old were likely to be seated side by side in the same class' (Lonstreet & Shane, 1993). Our earliest American schools were multi-aged. They included all the children of the village, from ages 6 to 16.

Even the school rooms of 25 to 50 years ago contained children of a wide variety of ages with just one teacher.

It was not until the 1840s that the graded classroom began to appear in the United States. This was after a noted educator and statesman, Horace Mann, brought the idea from Prussia and implemented it in Massachusetts. It became the common-school system. (p. 1)

The Graded System

With such a long history of nongraded classrooms one may question why the graded system was adopted. Daniel & Terry (1995) provide one explanation:

It is suggested that one reason that gradedness became popular was the development of graded materials such as the McGuffey reading series, five separate readers following one another in levels of difficulty (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993.). Blount (1992) writes that at first the implementation of separate grade classrooms separated children, but did not create the idea of set periods of time in a class followed by promotion or retention. However long it took to move to the next class, students advanced only when they were ready. (p. 7)

Moen (n. d.) reveals that there may be other reasons as well:

Many thought that this was an easy, 'assembly line' way of educating children. 'It was believed that children learned best by memorizing in small groups organized according to ability' (Longstreet, et. Al., 1993, p.10) and dividing them according to age made it easier. Within a decade, Mann's ideas were being widely accepted. Legislation followed standardizing age of entry and establishing sequential grade levels and curricula. (p.1)

In The Cyclopedia of Education: A Dictionary of Information for the Use of Teachers, School Officers, Parents, and Others (1877), arguments for the advantages of the graded system were advanced:

The advantages of the graded system have been thus enumerated: (1) They economize the labour of instruction; (2) They reduce the cost of instruction, since a smaller number of teachers are required for effective work in a classified or graded school; (3) They make the instruction more effective, inasmuch as the teacher can more readily hear the lessons of the

entire class than of the pupils separately, and thus there will be better opportunity for actual teaching, explanation, drill etc.; (4) They facilitate good government and discipline, because all pupils are kept constantly under the direct control and instruction of the teacher, and besides, are kept constantly busy; (5) They afford a better means of inciting pupils to industry, by promoting their ambition to excel, inasmuch as there is a constant competition among the pupils of a class, which cannot exist when the pupils are instructed separately (p.3). (Miller, 1967, p. 2)

With such advantages being widely accepted, it is not surprising that the graded system quickly became very well established and is still very prominent in the twenty-first century. However, it had, and still has, critics. It is interesting to note that as far back as 1877 directly following the list of the advantages of the graded system quoted above from The Cyclopaedia of Education: A Dictionary of Information for the Use of Teachers, School Officers, Parents, and Others (1877), the authors acknowledge that "Many objections have been urged against the system of graded schools, chief among which is that the interests of the individual pupil are often sacrificed to those of the many, the individual being merged in the mass" (Miller, 1967, p. 2). Miller (1967) is concerned that the graded structure is no longer appropriate but is retained by tradition:

One can understand how the graded movement marked an improvement in instruction in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. But as so often happens, yesterday's hearsay becomes today's dogma. What was appropriate in the nineteenth century for industry, agriculture, and education no longer suffices. Everyone agrees, but the mills of the gods grind slowly. To preserve one's heritage is one thing, to cling to antiquated structure is another. (Miller, 1967, p. 3)

The Influence of John Dewey

The well known educator, John Dewey, also critiqued the graded system. Dewey felt that the schools in the 1930s needed to be "liberated from their inflexible conceived

subject matter'... and groupings" (Moen, n. d., p. 1). In fact as early as 1897, Dewey wrote "My Pedagogic Creed" in which he stated:

In sum, I believe that the individual and society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests and habits. It must be controlled at every point by reference to these same considerations. (Dewey, 1897, p. 22)

Evidently, many of Dewey's beliefs in education are reflected in multi-age classrooms where the interests and uniqueness of children are recognized in a community setting where children interact with various age groups and teachers track the individual progress of their students not only in academic areas but also in psychological and social areas.

The Influence of Maria Montessori

Some of the main characteristics of multi-age classrooms are also characteristics of Montessori schools. Montessori schools can be found in at least fifty-two countries on six continents. They were started by Maria Montessori who was born in 1870 and died in 1952. A medical doctor and proved educator, she "concentrated on the goal of education, rather than its methods" (Lillard, 1996, p. 3). Although Montessori schools have many unique characteristics, the underlying philosophy is similar to that of multi-age programs. In fact, Maria Montessori, in her eighties, looked back upon her life's work and presented the essence of her ideas in an overview. Three main theses which emerged in her overview are presented in the following summary:

Human development does not occur in a steady, linear ascent but in a series of formative planes.

The complete development of human beings is made possible by their tendencies to certain universal actions in relation to the environment. Interaction with the environment is most productive in terms of the individual's development when it is self-chosen and founded upon individual interest. (Lillard, pp. 4-5)

Just as multi-age programs may include children of two or more different ages, so do programs in Montessori schools. Montessori firmly believed in the merit of combining children of various ages into one class. In fact as Lillard (1996) notes, Montessori saw multi-age grouping as the preferred model of classroom grouping:

Even if we had over a thousand children and a palace for a school, I would still think it advisable to keep together children with an age difference of three years. ... The combination of various stages of the children's development 'makes possible the best individual formation'. (p. 39)

Lillard (1996) argues for this grouping method:

The indirect learning that occurs among children is a primary reason for placing of children of different ages in one environment. The youngest children are guaranteed models for more mature behaviour than they themselves are capable of performing. The older children have opportunities to develop their potential for leadership and social responsibility. This indirect learning occurs in the intellectual area as well. Younger children observe the older children work with materials that they will use in the future. Older children spontaneously help the younger ones with materials that have already been introduced to the younger children but which they have not yet mastered. (p. 40)

Obviously both multi-age programs and Montessori programs are very much concerned with the development of the whole child as an individual and attempt to provide students with learning situations in realistic circumstances which include interactions among various age groups.

The One-Room School

Kasten and Clarke (1993) note that, although the one-room school of the late 1800s and early 1900s was based on the graded system, some of its benefits reflect characteristics of today's multi-age classroom. They identify some benefits of the one-room school:

The one-room school offered certain attributes that were very sound educationally. First of all, children remained with the same teacher and primarily the same class of students for multiple years. School was a stable, reliable environment for the children who attended. Second, the mix of ages and abilities provided optimum opportunities for student collaboration. "Almost universally, adults who were products of the one-room schools have fond memories of their early schooling". (p. 5)

The Family Grouping Model

The warm caring atmosphere found in such schools led to the family grouping model:

Capitalizing on some of these strengths, British educators planned and implemented a family grouping model to help heal the emotional scars of children who were sent away from their families during World War II. These educators viewed this model as potentially the most nurturing, supportive, educational environment they could create for a generation of children traumatized by the atrocities of war. In these primary schools, children were divided into three-year blocks of either ages 4-5-6, 5-6-7 or 6-7-8, and remained with the same teacher for several years' (Connell, 1987). (Kasten & Clarke, 1993, p. 5)

Although multi-age education is not widely accepted in today's education system, it has been steadily evolving. In fact, Miller (1967) acknowledges that since the turn of the twentieth century, there has been an increase in an individualized, rather than a graded, approach:

A precise date for the beginning of nongrading cannot be ascertained at this time. It is known that nongrading replaced grades in Western Springs, Illinois, in 1934 (Wheat, 1938, pp.26-28). The junior primary unit, as replacement for kindergarten and the first grade, was used in Richmond, Virginia, in 1936. The Maryland Avenue School in Milwaukee initiated a nongraded plan in 1942 but it was three years before any other school there followed the example (Kelly, 1948, p. 236). Today, 114 out of 116 Milwaukee elementary schools are classified as nongraded primary. (p. 3)

The Influence of John Goodlad and Robert Anderson

Miller acknowledges that well known American educator, Dr. John Goodlad, identified 16 centers with active nongraded units in 1955. During the 1957-1958 school year Goodlad and Anderson surveyed approximately 134 communities in 40 states believed to have in operation some form of nongraded organization. They concluded that about 50 of the communities surveyed were operating bona fide nongraded schools at that time.

Goodlad and Anderson were very prominent educators in the nongraded movement during the second half of the twentieth century. In 1959, in a popular book, The Nongraded Elementary School, they comment on the "anachronistic nature of the graded school structure and many of the practices that inevitably accompany it" (p.1). Their aim is to seek to propose and describe an alternative model: "a nongraded structure and a variety of more enlightened school practices that are related to the absence of grades and lock-step" (Goodlad & Anderson, 1963, p.1).

Goodlad and Anderson make an interesting analogy between the graded system and Procrustes, a character from Greek mythology. They explain that:

Greek mythology tells us of the cruel robber, Procrustes (the Stretcher). When travellers sought his house for shelter, they were tied onto an iron

bedstead. If the traveller was shorter than the bed, Procrustes stretched him out until he was the same length as the bed. If he was longer, his limbs were chopped off to make him fit. Procrustes shaped both short and tall until they were equally long and equally dead. (Goodlad & Anderson, 1963, p. 1)

Goodlad and Anderson (1963) argue that there are similarities between the graded system and such mythical practices:

Certain time-honored practices of pupil classification, while perhaps not lethal, trap school-age travellers in much the same fashion as Procrustes' bed trapped the unwary. These practices are concomitants of our graded system of school organization. First, a certain amount of progress is held to be standard for a year's work. Then the content of the work is laid out within the grade, to be 'covered' and, to a degree, 'mastered'. The slow are pulled and stretched to fit the grade. Sometimes because their God-given limbs lack enough elasticity, they are 'nonpromoted' - left behind, where presumably another year of stretching will do the trick. The quick are compressed and contracted to fit the grade. In time, they learn to adapt to a pace that is slower than their natural one. (p. 1)

The point that Goodlad and Anderson are making is that the rigorous ordering of children's abilities and attainments into the conventional graded structure defies the realities of child development. They elaborate on this point with the following example:

In the average first grade there is a spread of four years in pupil readiness to learn as suggested by mental age data. As the pupils progress through the grades, the span in readiness widens. Furthermore, a single child does not progress all of a piece: he tends to spurt ahead more rapidly in some areas than in others. Consequently, a difference of one grade between his reading attainment and his arithmetic attainment at the end of the second grade classification may be extended to a three or four grade difference by the end of his fifth year in school. (Goodlad & Anderson, 1963, p. 3)

Thus, Goodlad and Anderson strongly contend that at any given time a fifth grade teacher, in spite of his designation, is not only teaching students at the grade five level but also students at grades three, four, six, seven, eight and sometimes even grade nine levels.

It is believed that The Nongraded Elementary School influenced many during the 1960s and sparked the development of many schools that claimed to be multi-aged. At that time, however, Goodlad himself doubted the magnitude of the development of nongraded schools. Moen (n. d.) quotes a disillusioned Goodlad as saying "My own view is that there are, indeed, precious few multi-aged schools. ... The concepts guiding nongrading are becoming part of the rambling rhetoric, the cant of current educational orthodoxy" (p. 1). Moen's interpretation of what was happening is revealing:

In other words, schools were combining children of different ages, but continuing to teach them as they would teach a separate grade level, breaking them into grade groups within the classroom. Many of these early attempts at multi-age classrooms failed due to inadequate understanding, lack of administrative and community support, and the lack of power to overcome organizational structures which were politically safe and administratively convenient. (Moen, n.d., pp. 1-2)

There was a core group of educators who followed through in developing multi-age classrooms as envisioned by Goodlad and Anderson. One such example included the principal, Murray Fessel, and the assistant principal, Lillian Glogau, at Old Bethpage School at Plainview, Long Island. These two administrators decided to write a book about their experience in implementing a nongraded program in their school during the 1964-65 school year. The purpose they state for writing The Nongraded Primary School was twofold. The first purpose was to show why they "felt that nongrading is a successful organizational pattern for elementary schools" (Glogau & Fessel, 1967, p. 2).

The second purpose was to serve as an example for others wanting to set up a nongraded program. In this book, they examine their successes and also areas of implementation on which they needed to work. At the end of their first year of

implementing the program, they recognized the need to be cognizant of adjustments needed to ensure the success of their students and school.

The Detroit Program

During the 1960s, The Board of Education in Detroit took a major step towards the implementation of the nongraded classroom when in May, 1964, they approved a plan for a nongraded primary unit to replace the kindergarten and grades one and two (and three in some cases) for all Detroit public elementary schools. Miller (1967) notes the positive effects of this program:

Every pilot program changed as it developed: teacher enthusiasm increased, team planning skills strengthened, and teachers became better diagnosticians of learning difficulties. A most interesting development occurred with respect to the assignment of pupils to classes. The schools which originally favored more homogeneously grouping found advantages in modifying their systems so that several different achievement levels were placed in each class. In this way, no class had all of the most able or least able students. (p. 34)

According to Miller, while piloting the program, administrators and teachers saw greater provision for individual differences and increased success for children as well as for team approaches by staff. Thus, results from the pilot project contributed to the extension of the nongraded program at the primary level to the elementary level.

The Canadian Scene

Although multi-age classrooms are not very prominent in schools in Newfoundland today, the effort to ungrade schools has had a rather long history in Canada. In fact, as The Ontario Teachers' Federation (1968) stated, in Canada during the

first quarter of the twentieth century there were major efforts to bring about non-graded grouping:

A number of school reforms were initiated, particularly in the western provinces. British Columbia developed a reclassification system whereby students were permitted to progress at their own interests and ability. Alberta embarked upon variations of the Dalton and Winnetka plans before these plans were established in the United States. Stress was placed on learning by one's own volition and at one's own rate. By 1930 Saskatchewan and New Brunswick were experimenting with non-grading, the latter in both primary and elementary schools.

Throughout the 1960's there has been a strong resurgence of interest in the ungraded school. In 1964 the Saskatchewan Department of Education introduced legislation for a provincial nongraded . continuous progress program plan for its elementary schools. Moreover, there is a discernable trend in almost every province toward nongraded elementary schools at least. Quebec has also decreed that its schools shall be ungraded. (p. 9)

It may seem rather unbelievable today in the year 2000, when graded classrooms are still predominant in our education system, that in the late 1960s the Ontario Federation of Teachers felt concerned that Ontario was behind the other provinces in legislating for non-graded programs. In 1967, a Non-Graded Schools Committee was established by the executive of the Ontario Teachers' Federation to develop a position on the nongraded school which they might adopt. This committee compiled a Handbook on The Non-Graded School in which it clearly states that "It is not the Committee's task to sell the non-graded school. We much prefer to simply suggest that teachers study the concept carefully and then make their decisions accordingly" (p. 1).

Just as a committee was established in Ontario to look at the non-graded school there was also at least one committee set up in Newfoundland to examine the same. In 1968, the Anglican School Board in St. John's set up a committee to study the "feasibility

of 'a new-type of school organization often referred to as the continuous progress plan'

(Anglican School Board, 1968, p. 1). In the report of the committee, it was stated:

The need for the study of a more productive school organization has been prompted by the complaints of teachers and administrators. From time to time serious misgivings have been expressed about the ability of our present system to provide adequately for the basic needs of all children under our care. (p. 1)

The committee explained that they were seeking answers to the following questions:

Is it possible with our present school buildings, present allocation of teachers and present curriculum to provide some means whereby children and teachers may not be under pressure of final examinations, and where children can move through levels of learning experiences at a rate of speed consistent with what each child can understand and enjoy? Cannot we as teachers and administrators agree that what each child can accomplish in a given year is a good and satisfactory year's work? Cannot we continue with each child in a new school year where he stopped the previous year? Why do we have to announce to children that they fail if they have done as well as they can; and why do we have to force children to repeat what they already know, or hold them back if they have the ability and desire to go further? (Anglican School Board, 1968, p. 3)

The report ended with a discussion of the need for teacher involvement and cooperation if changes were to take place. The report concluded that an essential ingredient for the successful introduction of any new plan must be the cooperation of all the people involved. A necessary step in developing cooperation was that people understand what the plan was all about. This applied particularly to teachers:

It is understandable that all teachers could not be directly involved in the four study groups and it must be the responsibility of those who are involved to keep the issue alive in conversation with other teachers. It is only by open argument and serious study that any of us will hopefully be in a position to make a recommendation to our Board. (p. 10)

In 1970, Wayne Noseworthy, who later became president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, predicted that nongraded schools in Newfoundland, though not about to mushroom overnight, were not impossible. He saw a number of drawbacks which would need to be overcome: "Primarily there is a great need for innovative leadership on the part of the administrators, both at the school, district, and department levels" (p. 30). Equally needed, however, were teachers who were open to change:

A great number of newer, more change-minded teachers will have to be provided. It is true that many new teachers are entering the profession but until this new blood forms a majority, free from the bonds of tradition, and is mingled with and dilutes the old then nongradedness will be slow to arrive." (p. 31)

Noseworthy also felt that parental attitudes need to change: "Parents have to free themselves, or be freed, from their gradedness. Only then will the students be able to free themselves from the shackles of placing first, second or third in their grades" (p. 31). A further impediment that Noseworthy saw to the spread of nongradedness, was the reality of public examinations:

The province's system of evaluation has to be considered, particularly at the high school level. Public Examinations appear to be a great hurdle to overcome. However, these examinations themselves are not the culprits; it is the teachers and the administrators who perpetuate them. In two grade levels (9 and 10) the examinations could be eliminated if teacher and administrative pride and indolence - pride in a certain percentage of passes and indolence in not developing and following through with their own evaluative criteria - could be overcome. A desire to achieve accreditation (this would be a more commendable source of pride) could also eliminate the necessity of Public Examinations in Grade XI. (p. 31)

The slow pace of the development of the multi-age movement, which was predicted by Noseworthy, is evident in the lack of progress made. Dr. Dennis Mulcahy, a professor of education with Memorial University of Newfoundland, spoke with hope that multi-aging would be the future in Newfoundland schools, but he remained cynical. While being interviewed about multi-age education Mulcahy was quoted as saying, "I would like to think it would be the future, but like any other form or approach to education that is fundamentally child-centred, our system is generally hostile to that kind of approach to education" (Ducharme, 1998, p. 7).

The Present

Many different circumstances may serve as the basis of the initial implementation of multi-age programs in schools. Once introduced to the current multi-age approach to teaching, some educators are very interested in learning more about it. According to Chase and Doan (1994) in Full Circle A New Look At Multi-age Education:

The multi-age concept is receiving renewed attention because it allows educators to move toward a more developmentally appropriate educational program. It offers a reasonable solution to problems inherent in the outmoded practices of ability tracking and grade retention. The developmental philosophy encourages educators to address individual differences in children. As teachers recognize individual differences, they realize that there is no graded curriculum appropriate for all students of a particular age. (p. 4)

Current approaches and strategies in education, such as the whole language approach to literacy and the problem solving approach to mathematics, make allowances for the fact that students progress at different levels and encourage student use of literacy and mathematics for real purposes. Thus, they go hand in hand in support of multi-age

grouping as a valid environment for academic learning. Daniel and Terry recognize some of the current trends in education which are characteristic of the multi-age setting. They conclude that:

In the multiage classroom, lots of things are happening differently. Children can help children (peer tutoring) without fear of being accused of cheating. Students get excited about learning because they do purposeful activities that are frequently hands-on. The children in a classroom become active participants in their own learning and help to collect materials and documentation for the evaluation and assessment of their own work (Pavan, 1992). Planning involves teachers and students. A variety of materials are in use, not just textbooks. Activities may be planned for whole group, small group, paired, or individual instruction. Students are excited about poetry, writing, math, and reading. Assessment is more authentic and casual and less threatening. Activity stations abound, and rows of desks are disappearing. Group and individual projects are filling the halls. Student work hangs everywhere in the classroom. A great deal of attention is directed toward the individual needs of each child. Teachers are facilitating and guiding, not directing all day. Children are once again becoming excited about learning! (Daniel & Terry, 1995, p. 9)

Daniel & Terry (1995) also examine why this approach works better in the multi-age classroom. They conclude that although it can happen in the single-grade classroom, "it won't be the same" (p. 9). They also conclude that there will be more pressure on passing the grade and less emphasis on cross-grade helping:

Writers won't be helping emergent writers. Readers won't be helping emergent readers. Brothers and sisters won't be helping siblings and "old" students won't be helping new students to become more familiar with a new environment and new processes. Children won't have the opportunity to learn and develop at their own rates without the ever-present concern about passing a given grade. (p. 9)

The evolution of multi-age education in the United States of America has continued to grow steadily. In fact, by 1995, three states, including Kentucky,

Mississippi and Oregon had mandated multi-age programs for young learners. According to Daniel and Terry (1995):

In Kentucky, students who are or will be 5 years old by October 1 of the current school year are eligible to enter the Multi-age/Multi-ability Primary Program. The primary program is defined as the first 4 years a child is in school. Within the primary program each child progresses educationally at his or her own developmental rate and pace, with the teacher using continual assessment to ensure individual progress and success. Students in the primary program do not fail, no is there the need for them to skip a grade level to have appropriate educational curriculum. When it is deemed to be in the child's best interest, he or she may spend a 5th year, or they may exit the program in fewer than 4 years. (p. 11)

Research and Learning Theories Support Multi-age Education

It is noteworthy that multi-age grouping is supported world wide, including in New Zealand, a country with the highest literacy rate in the world. As Kasten and Clarke (1993) explain, "In New Zealand children are permitted to enter school on their fifth birthday, and move along at their own pace that first year. ... Differences among the children in abilities and interests are expected and celebrated as each child is socialized into the classroom community" (Connell, 1987, p. 5).

Multi-age Models Compared to Traditional Unit-aged Models

In their book, The Multi-age Classroom: A Family of Learners, Kasten and Clarke cite many studies in which direct comparisons were made between multi-age, family-grouped models and traditional unit-aged models (with children of the same age). They note, however, that many sources which focus on multi-age, family-grouped models are either unpublished research reports or articles that are more than 20 years old. Despite the fact that only a few recent sources are available, their collective reports show a

recognizable pattern. Kasten and Clarke (1993) explain that "Studies show that children in multi-age or family-grouped models score either similarly or better academically than their comparison peers in traditionally grouped classes"(p. 16). They cite the following reports which show that multi-age grouped children score more favourably, at least at some age levels, than do other children:

- Carbone in 1961
- Hamilton and Rehwoldt in 1957
- Buffie in 1963
- Gilbert in 1962 and 1964
- Moris et al. in 1971
- Schrankler in 1976
- Connell in 1987
- Gajadharsingh in 1991

Within some reports (i.e., Halliwell, 1963; Hillson et al., 1965; Milburn, 1981; Connell, 1987), multi-aged grouped children also scored better in certain verbal skills, whether these skills were reading, vocabulary, or other language-related skills. Kasten and Clarke also cite studies conducted by Day and Hunt in 1975, Graziano et al. in 1976, Lougee et al. in 1977 and Way in 1979. These studies showed that the development of language skills, such as vocabulary, is most often cited as a considerable advantage for children participating with mixed-aged peers because they receive maximum verbal stimulation. A study by Steere (1972) showed that multi-age grouped children scored

better in mathematical reasoning, whereas in other areas such as reading or language the sub-test scores were comparable to those of their peers.

The Work of Piaget and Vygotsky

Kasten and Clarke (1993) reflect on Piaget's work to help explain the above results. In their view, the fact that academic achievement is often a payoff in multi-aged groups may be explained in the work of Piaget (1947) and others such as Pontecorvo and Zuccheromoglio (1990), who describe how mixed-aged interactions stimulate disequilibrium, equilibrium, and cognitive growth especially in the less mature individuals participating in the interaction. The presence of the older children may help diminish the amount of time in erroneous thinking, mis-generalizations, or other developing but inaccurate hypotheses about the world. Disagreement, argumentation, and resistance are all conducive to thinking.

Chase and Doan (1994) refer not only to Piaget but also to Vygotsky who, in their opinion, "Have provided a context for understanding cognitive development as being intimately linked to the brain's active construction of knowledge within a social context" (p. 154). They explain that recent findings by Huttenlocker (1990) in neuropsychology on brain development and learning in childhood "confirm an organic basis for many of the theories put forth by Piaget and Vygotsky, as well as the educational approaches that have developed in response to these theories. Several central concepts within Piagetian and Vygotskian thought relate to the multi-age grouping of children" (Chase and Doan, p. 155). Chase and Doan (1994) explain Vygotsky's view by stating that:

In Vygotsky's (1978) view, the most fruitful experience in a child's education is his or her collaboration with more experienced or skilled partners. Vygotsky's much discussed "zone of proximal development" is that area within which the child (or novice) cannot act alone, but can act in cooperation with a person of greater expertise (see Moll 1990). The "expert" or more experienced social partner provides structure or an intellectual scaffold (Brown & Palincsar 1989; Bruner 1977), thus allowing the novice to accomplish what he or she may be ready for with support but could not accomplish alone. (p. 155)

In addition to Piaget and Vygotsky, Chase and Doan (1994) also recognize a notion discussed by Cairns (1986) which relates to the multi-age grouping of children. This notion is that "Human beings are biologically predisposed to synchronize their responses with those of others. This biological bias toward synchronization, which is reciprocal and bi-directional in character, is supported by overwhelming empirical evidence in animal and human research (Cairns 1986)". (Chase & Doan, 1994, p. 155).

Chase and Doan cite additional studies which support the idea that interaction amongst children in a multi-age setting strengthens the students' cognitive skills. Some studies reveal that:

Behaviours elicited in younger children when related to peers older than themselves include more mature and cognitively complex play (Goldman 1981; Mouts & Roopnarine 1987; Howse & Farver 1987) and less reliance on adults Goldman 1981; Ridgeway & Lawton 1965; Reuter & Yunik 1973); Shatz and Gelman (1973), for example, found that the speech of two-year-olds was significantly more complex when they were speaking with four-year-olds than when they were speaking with other two-year-olds. (Chase & Doan, 1994, p. 156)

Brownell (1990) also found that more complex modes of play resulted as the children actively adjusted their behaviour to that of others in multi-age groupings. As

Chase and Doan report, "The older child in the dyads made more complex and frequent social overtures to their younger partners than to their same-age peers" (p. 156).

Benefits For the Older Students

Even in citing Brownell's findings, one may still question the benefits of the multi-age classroom for the oldest children in the class. It is often easier to accept the benefits for older children who experience social difficulties than to accept the benefits for the average child amongst the oldest in the class. It should be noted, however, that:

French, Wass, Stright, and Baker (1986), who examined leadership behaviour in seven-through eleven-year-old children assigned to mixed or same-age triads, found that the older group members of mixed-age groups increased their organizational behaviour and solicitations of opinion, but exhibited less opinion-giving than their same-age counterparts in homogeneous age groups. Eleven-year-olds in a multi-age group were, in other words, more sophisticated and thoughtful in their leadership when they were with younger children, than were eleven-year-olds in same-age groups. (Chase and Doan, 1994, p. 159)

In addition to social benefits, academic benefits have also been noted as Chase and Doan (1994) explain:

As teachers have often noted, in the process of teaching one also consolidates and deepens one's own understanding. Likewise, children who tutor another child have been found to increase the depth and organization of their own knowledge (Bargh & Shul 1980). Katz et al. (1990) suggest that a similar phenomenon occurs as older children help and instruct younger children in the social conventions of community life. (p. 159)

According to McClellan (1993), Katz (1993) states:

Older children's self-esteem is often enhanced by their clear sense of contributing to younger children when they read to them or help them in other ways. What is interesting about this point is that help provided to "youngsters" by "olders" is evident and obvious to them – not phony, rhetorical, or distant. Parents of olders may worry that their children will do all the giving, but the olders gain in self-esteem. (p. 1)

McClellan (1993) recognizes that:

Becoming responsive to the interests, needs, and thoughts of others takes years to develop and is at the heart of participation in the family, the workplace, and democracy. Children are not so different from adults in that they, too, need to make meaningful, authentic, non-trivial contributions to their environment and to the lives of others. (p.1)

Another fact to keep in mind when considering the benefits of both the older and younger children in a multi-age class is that:

In a multi-age classroom, the child's position is constantly changing. One year she may be among the younger children, knowing less but eager to learn from and fit in with the older ones. The next year, new children may enter who are younger than she. She will continue to look to the older children for knowledge, but she will take on the added responsibility of being a guide for the younger ones. Eventually she will be among the oldest in the group, knowing some things by virtue of having been there the longest. (Kasten & Clarke, 1993, p. 57)

The Risk of Bullying

The risk of bullying by the older children is often a concern about mixed-age grouping. This is a legitimate concern; however, research indicates that:

children in mixed-age groups may be less likely to be bullied or to bully other children. Further, it has been argued that the concentration of same-age peers is a major factor in the extremely high incidence of aggressive, antisocial, and destructive acts in United States society (McClellan, 1994). In an international study, Whiting and Whiting (1975) found that children were more likely to behave aggressively with same-aged peers than with peers who differed in age by a year or more. McClellan (1994) compared teacher ratings of aggression levels in 34 mixed- and same-age preschool classrooms and found significantly higher levels of aggression in the same-age classrooms. In a more recent study with another sample of children, McClellan and Kinsey (1997) compared 649 children in first- through fifth-grade classrooms. Again, children in mixed-age classrooms were significantly less likely to be judged by their teachers as verbally and physically aggressive with classmates during work or play than those in same-age classes. One year after the initial study, when all children had returned to same-age classrooms, the children who had previously

participated in the mixed-age classrooms were still significantly less likely to behave aggressively (McClellan & Kinsey, 1997). (McClellan, 1997, p. 1)

McClellan elaborates on an investigation by Whiting and Edwards (1977) which is of particular importance in weighing the likelihood that children in mixed-age classes might tend to bully their younger classmates. In this investigation a distinction is made between the notion of aggressive versus dominant behaviours. The results indicate that the older children did tend to dominate their younger peers, but that they were also very nurturing. In other words, the dominance of the older students usually included nurturing and prosocial behaviour. McClellan (1997) explains:

Pure aggression, on the other hand, was seen more frequently among same-age peers in a constellation of behaviours that included sociableness, playfulness, rough-and-tumble play, teasing, and insulting. It is likely that dominance is a behaviour pattern that is distinct from, yet related to, aggression and bullying in all primates (Goodhall, 1986). One way various animal groups, including humans, allow for the expression of aggressive impulses yet maintain order is through the establishment of dominance hierarchies (Goodall, 1986; Maccoby, 1980). Established hierarchies serve at least two purposes. First, they reduce the amount of fighting among individuals because individual group members usually know in advance whom they may safely challenge and whom they had better leave alone (Maccoby, 1980). Second, older respected dominant individuals protect younger individuals from the threats and abuse of others (Goodall, 1986). (p. 2)

Age Related Hierarchies

Hierarchies created based on age are well established in history. McClellan (1997) elaborates:

A primary factor in the establishment of hierarchies among adult male primates is age (Goodall 1986). Challenges may be more frequent and stable hierarchies more difficult to maintain if many of the individuals in a social group are close to the same age, size, or physical ability. The

process of establishing a dominance hierarchy in a same-age group may be a far more difficult task than in a mixed-age group, and it may thus place a good deal more competitive stress on the group members. In addition, the psychological toll for low-status in the hierarchy of a same-age group may also be greater than in a mixed-age group. To be the low-status child in the pecking order in a group of 5- to 7-year-olds may be at times uncomfortable, but the child knows that in two years her place in the hierarchy will change and that in the meantime she is likely to be protected from harsher and more mean-spirited attempts at dominance. The child in the same-age class, on the other hand, may be more likely to regard her status as a stable reflection of her worth and acceptance.

This interpretation is borne out by evidence that children prefer to be taught by children older than themselves rather than children their same age, and that they prefer to teach children younger than themselves (Allen & Feldman, 1976; French, 1984; McClellan, 1994). Again this preference may be, in part, because older children can more comfortably establish dominance over younger children, and further, younger children can more comfortably yield to the dominance of an older child without the loss of face or feeling of vulnerability that might accompany submission to a same-age peer. (McClellan, 1997, p. 2)

Kommer (1999) confirms that:

Studies show that multi-age classes improve student attitudes. Don Jeanroy (1996) reports that students in his school appeared to be happier and that older students "seemed to enjoy the new sense of leadership that they were expected to fulfill while working with their younger peers." Pavan (1992) found that at-risk students "had better self concepts, [and] attitudes towards school" than students in a traditional setting. (p. 2)

Summary

The Review of the Literature in this chapter has provided a firm foundation which I can draw upon to produce the Handbook. By tracing the evolution of multi-age education from past to present, the material necessary for new teachers beginning multi-age education was covered. The first section of the Handbook is my summary and synthesis of this evolution. I have presented the background information which I would like to have had available when I began teaching using this approach.

A significant history is revealed in this literature review. Although the graded system of education delivery has dominated since its appearance in the 1840s, the nongraded philosophy of multi-age education has persisted and survived. There has been a constant thread linking the work of famous educators such as Dewey, Montessori, Goodlad and Anderson. This thread has kept together teaching practices reflected in today's multi-age classrooms which are supported by some of the learning theories of Piaget & Vygotsky and Cairns.

Many research studies conducted since 1957 reveal that multi-age grouped students score either similarly or better academically than single graded students. Current support of multi-age education is very evident in New Zealand and the United States of America. It is especially noteworthy that the three states of Kentucky, Mississippi and Oregon have all mandated multi-age education programs.

Thus it may be said that the evolution of multi-age education did not happen suddenly. It has been, and continues to be, a slow but steady paced movement that is supported by research and learning theories.

Chapter 4

The Establishment of Multi-age Education – Then and Now (A Handbook for Teachers of Multi-age Classrooms)

This chapter contains the completed handbook, *The Establishment of Multi-age Education – Then and Now*, as it will be presented to School District #3. Therefore, the format is different from that of this report on the project, and the pagination is separate and specific to the handbook.

The Establishment of Multi-age Education -- Then and Now

A Handbook for
Teachers in Multi-age Classrooms
in School District #3,
Corner Brook-Deer Lake-St. Barbe



Developed By:

Elizabeth J. Elder

Preface

Since the inception of School District #3 in 1997, implementation of multi-age education continuous progress programming, which was established in 1989 under Western Integrated School Board, has continued to develop. As a means of supporting teachers involved in multi-age continuous progress education, District Office has been collecting materials related to multi-age education. The handbook, *The Establishment of Multi-age Education - Then and Now*, will be a great addition to this collection as it fills a need voiced by teachers and principals in District #3 for a handbook which offers historical information behind the evolution of multi-age education and additional information pertinent to multi-age education progress programs.

Elizabeth Elder worked closely with district personnel and was cognizant of the information contained in District #3's *Multi-age Education Policy Handbook (draft)* which was being developed simultaneously with this handbook. This policy handbook includes information that would support teachers and administrators in implementing the proposed policies on multi-age continuous progress education. While the handbook contains some

background information on multi-age education, and its implementation, understandably it does not provide the depth of treatment that can be supplied by a handbook devoted to that purpose.

Because Ms. Elder was fully aware of the contents of the policy handbook and of teachers' wish to have more detailed information, she was able to produce a handbook relevant to the establishment of multi-age education continuous progress programs in District #3. I endorse its use.

Renee Sherstobetoff
Program Specialist, School District #3
September 2001

Table of Contents

Preface	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Multi-age Education in School District #3	7
Section One: The Evolution of Multi-age Education - Significant Events and Educators	10
Early Multi-age Groupings	12
The Graded System	14
The Influence of John Dewey	17
The Influence of Maria Montessori	18
The One-Room School	21
The Family Grouping Model	22
The Influence of John Goodlad and Robert Anderson	23
The Canadian Scene	26
The Present	31
Section Two: Getting Started: Commonly Asked Questions About Multi-age Education	35
Question One: Is multi-age education for all students?	36
Question Two: Do special education students and special education teachers have a place in multi-age classrooms?	39
Question Three: Who should teach multi-age classes?	42
Question Four: Will I have to change my teaching methods?	44
Question Five: How can I become more familiar with multi-age education?	46
Question Six: Is it better to start teaching two grade levels rather than three grade levels?	48
Question Seven: Who should be involved when planning the initial set-up?	50

Table of Contents

Question Eight: What pitfalls might be encountered?	53
Question Nine: What is the role of specialist teachers working with a multi-age class?	56
 Section Three: The Importance Of Communicating the	
Concept of Multi-age Continuous Progress Education	60
Misconceptions About Multi-age Education	61
Communicating the Concept to Parents	64
Communicating the Concept to and Amongst Staff Members	70
 Conclusion	 73
 References	 76
 Appendix 1: Questionnaire	 79

Introduction



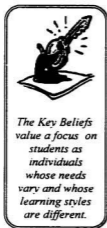
The purpose of this project is to provide a handbook for teachers of multi-age classrooms in School District #3. Section One of this handbook provides teachers with historical information about the evolution of multi-age education; Section Two addresses commonly asked questions which arise when multi-age education is being introduced in a school; and Section Three focuses on the importance of multi-age education. This information may be valuable for all teachers in multi-age classrooms, but especially for teachers who are teaching in a multi-age setting for the first time. Since this handbook is being developed for School District #3, particular attention has been given to supporting the practices and policies that are being developed by District #3 for multi-age classrooms under its jurisdiction. During the 1999-2000 school year, in response to a need expressed both by schools



and the School Board to develop policies on multi-age education, School District #3 established a committee which was charged with the task of drafting policies, guidelines, and procedures for multi-age classrooms in the District. This work was completed in draft form at the end of the 1999—2000 school year. At the time of writing, it has yet to be presented to and approved by the School Board for School District #3; however, this handbook has been written with those draft policies, procedures, and guidelines in mind. Regardless of any changes to those draft policies, the practical information contained in this handbook still will be of benefit to teachers who are teaching in multi-age classrooms in District #3.

In preparation for the development of this handbook, research literature on multi-age grouping was examined and surveys were sent to four schools

practicing multi-age education in District #3. Three different surveys were developed: one for principals, one for multi-age teachers, and one for parents of children enrolled in a multi-age class. The results of the surveys are cited and discussed at appropriate points throughout the Handbook.






The information contained in School District #3's *Multi-age Education Policy Handbook (draft)* and documents pertaining to instruction produced by the Department of Education for Newfoundland and Labrador were also examined. The *Primary/Elementary Levels Handbook (draft)* contains a statement of key beliefs about education K-6. These key beliefs clearly value a focus on students as individuals whose needs vary and whose learning styles are different. The key beliefs demonstrate a need for students to have opportunities to develop intellectually, spiritually, and

physically; they also acknowledge that learning is a life-long process.

The Department of Education also recognizes the importance of resource-based learning as a means of helping children develop the skills necessary to life-long learning. Resource-based learning officially established a role in the schools of Newfoundland and Labrador in 1993 when the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Education and Training, Division of Program Development compiled the document entitled *Learning to Learn*. As cited in the *Primary/Elementary Levels Handbook*, resource-based learning has the following characteristics:



Resource Based Learning

-  students are active participants in facilitating their own learning
-  learning experiences are planned from the outcomes
-  learning strategies and skills are identified and taught within all subjects

- ★ a wide variety of appropriate resources are used
- ★ learning environments are varied
- ★ instructional strategies which reflect learning styles are employed
- ★ teachers facilitate, guide, monitor, and evaluate student learning
- ★ teachers and administrators work together to enable a resource-based approach (p. 52).

☞ *Whole language*

☞ *Classroom workshops*


☞ *Collaborative approaches*

☞ *Problem solving*

In addition to seeing a need for a resource-based approach to teaching and learning, the *Primary/Elementary Levels Handbook* describes other methodologies and philosophies that support the Key Beliefs. These include, but are not necessarily restricted to, a constructivist philosophy which includes whole language and classroom workshops; collaborative approaches to learning and instruction; and problem solving and inquiry in math and science. Traditional classrooms, which support a transmission model of

instruction in which the teacher takes on the role of 'dispenser of knowledge', are not as conducive to children's developing the skills necessary to life-long learning.

Multi-age classrooms require a focus on individual growth and development.



Multi-age classrooms, by their very nature, require a focus on individual growth and development and are, therefore, reflective of a constructivist philosophy of instruction. The "Key Beliefs About Education" cited in the *Primary/Elementary Levels Handbook* are also the beliefs that guide learning and instruction in a multi-age setting.

Multi-age Education in School District #3



Since the inception of School District #3 in 1997, and following from the establishment of multi-age classrooms in Western Integrated School District in



1989, School District #3 has supported the concept of multi-age grouping at all levels of schooling. School District #3 sees multi-age classroom groupings as an excellent learning environment for children rather than seeing it only as a means of dealing with declining enrollments. The District has not mandated multi-age classroom grouping, but certainly has provided encouragement and support to schools and teachers wishing to offer it as an option to parents and to schools where declining enrollments dictate combining more than one grade in a class.

School District #3 defines multi-age grouping in the *Multi-age Education Policy Handbook (draft)* as follows:

Multi-age continuous progress education is a classroom organizational structure in which children of two or more age levels work together. In their everyday lives, children interact with people of all ages. Their lives are enriched by the many



experiences they have and by the relationships they develop. Multi-age education is a natural and logical extension of children's home environments. Multi-age education is based on a belief that children will benefit from a learning environment that values diversity. In a classroom in which there is a wide range of ability, children's contributions to classroom life strengthen both their academic and social experiences. (p. 2)





Section One

The Evolution of Multi-age Education - Significant Events and Educators



This section will address the following major themes which have helped shape the evolution of multi-age education:

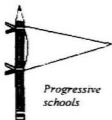
- Early Multi-age Groupings
- The Graded System
- The Influence of John Dewey
- The Influence of Maria Montessori
- The One-Room School
- The Family Grouping Model
- The Influence of John Goodlad and Robert Anderson
- The Canadian Scene
- The Present



Early Multi-age Groupings



Classes compiled of various ages have existed since the beginning of the educational system. While this may be the only characteristic they have in common with what is defined as a multi-age class today, in examining the history of education it becomes evident that the multi-age groupings have been recognized by many famous educators. It is important to keep in mind that the graded system was not implemented until the mid 1800s. Chase & Doan (1994), citing Patrick Shannon's work (1990), summarize how multi-age groupings have long existed in what was seen as progressive schools:



Comenius suggested multi-age groupings so that 'one pupil serves as an example and a stimulus for another' (p. 22). Shannon also documents the ideals and histories of progressive schools based on the multi-age concepts, which works for children and adults alike. Among the progressive

schools he describes are the Quincy Schools of the 1870s, in which individuality was the system; the Moonlight Schools in Kentucky, where students served as instructors under the slogan, 'Each one teach one'; and the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, where staff members were instructed to teach by demonstrating their capacity to learn. (p. 4).

According to Moen (n. d.) the history of multi-age education goes back to ancient times:



*Historical
progression of multi-
age education:*

- early Jews
- ancient Greece
- medieval trade guilds
- earliest American schools

The early Jews developed schools for boys from ages six to thirteen and taught them in the synagogues. In ancient Greece, young boys, age 7-18 were brought together to receive physical and mental training. In medieval trade guilds, students studied with their teachers until they were ready to be on their own. Some would finish their apprenticeship soon; others might take a longer time. Each was considered as good as the artisan who had taught him. In the monasteries of the 1500s, 'a sixteen year old and a six year old were likely to be seated side by side in the same class' (Lonstreet & Shane, 1993). Our earliest American schools were multi-aged. They included all the children of the village, from ages 6 to 16. Even the school rooms of 25 to 50 years ago contained



children of a wide variety of ages with just one teacher.

It was not until the 1840s that the graded classroom began to appear in the United States. This was after a noted educator and statesman, Horace Mann, brought the idea from Prussia and implemented it in Massachusetts. It became the common-school system. (p. 1)

The Graded System



With the long history of the nongraded classroom one may question why the graded system was adopted.

According to Daniel & Terry (1995):

It is suggested that one reason that gradedness became popular was the development of graded materials such as the McGuffey reading series, five separate readers following one another in levels of difficulty (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). Blount (1992) writes that at first the implementation of separate grade classrooms separated children, but did not create the idea of set periods of time in a class followed by promotion or retention. However long it took to move to the next class, students advanced only when they were ready. (p. 7)

Graded materials developed



Moen (n. d.) reveals that there may be other reasons as well:



Many thought that this was an easy, 'assembly line' way of educating children. It was believed that children learned best by memorizing in small groups organized according to ability' (Longstreet, et. Al., 1993, p. 10) and dividing them according to age made it easier. Within a decade, Mann's ideas were being widely accepted. Legislation followed standardizing age of entry and establishing sequential grade levels and curricula. (p. 1)

In The Cyclopedia of Education: A Dictionary of Information for the Use of Teachers, School Officers, Parents, and Others (1877) arguments for the advantages of the graded system were advanced:

The advantages of the graded system have been thus enumerated: (1) They economize the labour of instruction; (2) They reduce the cost of instruction, since a smaller number of teachers are required for effective work in a classified or graded school; (3) They make the instruction more effective, inasmuch as the teacher can more readily hear the lessons of the entire class than of the pupils separately, and

thus there will be better opportunity for actual teaching, explanation, drill etc.: (4) They facilitate good government and discipline, because all pupils are kept constantly under the direct control and instruction of the teacher, and besides, are kept constantly busy; (5) They afford a better means of inciting pupils to industry, by promoting their ambition to excel, inasmuch as there is a constant competition among the pupils of a class, which cannot exist when the pupils are instructed separately (p. 3). (Miller, 1967, p. 2)



With such advantages being widely accepted, it is not surprising that the graded system quickly became very well established and is still very prominent in the twenty-first century. However, it had, and still has, critics. It is interesting to note that as far back as 1877, directly following the list of the advantages of the graded system quoted above from The Encyclopedia of Education: A Dictionary of Information for the Use of Teachers, School Officers, Parents, and Others (1877), the authors acknowledge that "Many objections have

been urged against the system of graded schools, chief among which is that the interests of the individual pupil are often sacrificed to those of the many, the individual being merged in the mass " (Miller, 1967, p. 2).

The Influence of John Dewey



The well known educator, John Dewey, also critiqued this system. John Dewey felt that the schools in the 1930s needed to be "liberated from their inflexible conceived subject matter'... and groupings." (Moen, n. d., p. 1) In fact, as early as 1897, John Dewey wrote My Pedagogic Creed in which he stated:



In sum, I believe that the individual and society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests and habits. It

must be controlled at every point by reference to these same considerations. (Dewey, 1897, p. 22)



Evidently, many of Dewey's beliefs about education are reflected in multi-age classrooms where the interests and uniqueness of children are recognized in a community setting where children interact with various age groups and teachers track the individual progress of their students in various areas—not only in academic areas but also in psychological and social areas.

The Influence of Maria Montessori



Some of the main characteristics of multi-age classrooms are also main characteristics in Montessori schools. Montessori schools can be found in at least fifty-two countries on six continents. They were started by Maria Montessori who was born in 1870 and died in 1952. A medical doctor and proved educator,

*Montessori ...
... concentrated
on the goal of
education,
rather than its
methods ...*

Lillard

she "concentrated on the goal of education, rather than its methods" (Lillard, 1996, p.3). Although Montessori schools have many characteristics of their own, the underlying philosophy is similar to that of multi-age programs. In fact Maria Montessori, in her eighties, looked back upon her life's work and presented the essence of her ideas in an overview. Three main theses which emerged in her overview are presented in the following summary:



Montessori promoted combining age groups

Human development does not occur in a steady, linear ascent but in a series of formative planes.

The complete development of human beings is made possible by their tendencies to certain universal actions in relation to the environment.

Interaction with the environment is most productive in terms of the individual's development when it is self-chosen and founded upon individual interest. (Lillard, 1996, pp. 4-5)

Just as multi-age programs may include children of two or more different ages, so do programs in

Montessori schools. Montessori firmly believed in the merit of combining children of various ages into one class. In fact as Lillard (1996) notes, Montessori saw multi-age grouping as the preferred model of classroom grouping:



Even if we had over a thousand children and a palace for a school, I would still think it advisable to keep together children with an age difference of three years.' (Montessori, 1989, p.60). 'The combination of various stages of the children's development 'makes possible the best individual formation'. (p. 39)

Obviously both multi-age programs and Montessori programs are very much concerned with the development of the whole child as an individual and attempt to provide students with learning situations in realistic circumstances which include interactions among various age groups.





The One-Room School



Kasten and Clarke (1993) note that although the one-room school of the late 1800s and early 1900s was based on the graded system, some of its benefits reflect characteristics of today's multi-age classroom.

They identify some benefits of the one-room school:

The one-room school offered certain attributes that were very sound educationally. First of all, children remained with the same teacher and primarily the same class of students for multiple years. School was a stable, reliable environment for the children who attended. Second, the mix of ages and abilities provided optimum opportunities for student collaboration. 'Almost universally, adults who were products of the one-room schools have fond memories of their early schooling. (p. 5)



The Family Grouping Model



The warm caring atmosphere found in such schools

led to the family grouping model:



Capitalizing on some of these strengths, British educators planned and implemented a family grouping model to help heal the emotional scars of children who were sent away from their families during World War II. These educators viewed this model as potentially the most nurturing, supportive, educational environment they could create for a generation of children traumatized by the atrocities of war. In these primary schools, children were divided into three-year blocks of either ages 4-5-6, 5-6-7 or 6-7-8, and remained with the same teacher for several years' (Connell, 1987). (Kasten & Clarke, 1993, p. 5)

Although multi-age education is not widely

accepted in today's education system, it has been steadily evolving. In fact, Miller (1967) acknowledges that, since the turn of the twentieth century, there has

*Multi-age
education
has been
steadily
evolving...*

been an increase in an individualized, rather than graded, approach:

A precise date for the beginning of non-grading cannot be ascertained at this time. It is known that nongrading replaced grades in Western Springs, Illinois, in 1934. (Wheat, 1938, pp. 26-28) The junior primary unit, as replacement for kindergarten and the first grade, was used in Richmond, Virginia, in 1936. The Maryland Avenue School in Milwaukee initiated a nongraded plan in 1942 but it was three years before any other school there followed the example. (Kelly, 1948, p. 236) Today, 114 out of 116 Milwaukee elementary schools are classified as nongraded primary. (p. 3)



The Influence of John Goodlad and Robert Anderson



Miller acknowledges that well known American educator, Dr. John Goodlad, identified sixteen centers with active nongraded units in 1955. During the 1957-58 school year, Goodlad and Anderson surveyed approximately 134 communities in 40 states believed to

... 16 centres with
active nongraded
units in 1995

have in operation some form of nongraded organization. They concluded that about 50 of the communities surveyed were operating bona fide nongraded schools at that time.

Goodlad and Anderson were very prominent educators in the nongraded movement during the second half of the twentieth century. In 1959, in a popular book, The Nongraded Elementary School, they comment on the "anachronistic nature of the graded school structure and many of the practices that inevitably accompany it" (p. 1). Their aim is to seek, propose, and describe an alternative model: "a nongraded structure and a variety of more enlightened school practices that are related to the absence of grades and lock-step" (Goodlad & Anderson, 1963, p. 1).

... aim is to seek, propose and describe an alternative model

It is believed that The Nongraded Elementary School influenced many during the 1960s and sparked

the development of many schools that claimed to be multi-aged. At that time, however, Goodlad himself doubted the magnitude of the development of nongraded schools. Moen (n. d.) quotes a disillusioned Goodlad as saying "My own view is that there are, indeed, precious few multi-aged schools. ... The concepts guiding nongrading are becoming part of the rambling rhetoric, the cant of current educational orthodoxy" (p.1). Moen's interpretation of what was happening is revealing:



In other words, schools were combining children of different ages, but continuing to teach them as they would teach a separate grade level, breaking them into grade groups within the classroom. Many of these early attempts at multi-age classrooms failed due to inadequate understanding, lack of administrative and community support, and the lack of power to overcome organizational structures which were politically safe and administratively convenient. (Moen, n. d., pp.1-2)

The Canadian Scene



Although multi-age classrooms are not very prominent in schools in Newfoundland today, the effort to ungrade schools has had a rather long history in Canada. In fact, as the Ontario Teachers' Federation (1968) stated, in Canada during the first quarter of a century there were major efforts to bring about non-graded grouping:



*Early efforts in
Canadian provinces of:*

- Ontario
- British Columbia
- Alberta
- Saskatchewan
- New Brunswick
- Quebec

A number of school reforms were initiated, particularly in the western provinces. British Columbia developed a reclassification system whereby students were permitted to progress at their own interests and ability. Alberta embarked upon variations of the Dalton and Winnetka plans before these plans were established in the United States. Stress was placed on learning by one's own volition and at one's own rate. By 1930 Saskatchewan and New Brunswick were experimenting with non-grading, the latter in both primary and elementary schools.

Throughout the 1960's there has been a strong resurgence of interest in the ungraded school. In 1964 the Saskatchewan Department of Education

introduced legislation for a provincial nongraded , continuous progress program plan for its elementary schools. Moreover, there is a discernable trend in almost every province toward nongraded elementary schools at least. Quebec has also decreed that its schools shall be ungraded. (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1968, p. 9)



It may seem rather unbelievable today when graded classrooms are still predominant in our education system that in the late 1960s the Ontario Federation of Teachers felt that Ontario was somewhat behind the other provinces in legislating for non-graded programs. In 1967, a Non-Graded Schools Committee was established by the executive of the Ontario Teachers' Federation who were mainly concerned about the development of the stand which the Ontario Teachers' Federation might take towards the non-graded school. This committee compiled a Handbook on The Non-Graded School in which it clearly states that, "It is not

*Newfoundland
establishes a
committee to
... study the
"feasibility of 'a
new-type school
organization often
referred to as the
continuous
progress plan' "...*

*Anglican School
Board*

the Committee's task to sell the non-graded school. We much prefer to simply suggest that teachers study the concept carefully and then make their decisions accordingly" (p. 1).

Just as a committee was established in Ontario to look at the non-graded school there was also at least one committee set up in Newfoundland to examine the same issue. In 1968, the Anglican School Board in St. John's set up a committee to study the "feasibility of 'a new-type school organization often referred to as the continuous progress plan" (Anglican School Board, 1968, p. 1).



*... nongraded
schools are
not about to
mushroom
overnight*

In 1970, Wayne Noseworthy, who later became president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, predicted that nongraded schools in Newfoundland, though not about to mushroom overnight, were not impossible. He saw a number of drawbacks which would need to be overcome: "Primarily

there is a great need for innovative leadership on the part of the administrators, both at the school, district, and department levels" (p. 30). Equally needed, however, were teachers who were open to change:



A great number of newer, more change-minded teachers will have to be provided. It is true that many new teachers are entering the profession but until this new blood forms a majority, free from the bonds of tradition, and is mingled with and dilutes the old then non-gradedness will be slow to arrive. (Noseworthy, 1970, p. 31)

Parents have to free themselves, or be freed, from their grademindedness

Noseworthy (1970) also felt that parental attitudes need to change: "Parents have to free themselves, or be freed, from their grademindedness. Only then will the students be able to free themselves from the shackles of placing first, second or third in their grades" (p. 31). A further impediment that Noseworthy saw to the spread of non-gradedness, was the reality of public examinations:

The provinces system of evaluation has to be considered, particularly at the high

school level. Public Examinations appear to be a great hurdle to overcome. However, these examinations themselves are not the culprits; it is the teachers and the administrators who perpetuate them. In two grade levels (9 and 10) the examinations could be eliminated if teacher and administrative pride and indolence - pride in a certain percentage of passes and indolence in not developing and following through with their own evaluative criteria - could be overcome. A desire to achieve accreditation (this would be a more commendable source of pride) could also eliminate the necessity of Public Examinations in Grade XI. (p. 31)



The slow pace of the development of the multi-age movement, which was predicted by Noseworthy, is evident in the lack of progress made. Dennis Mulcahy, a professor of education with Memorial University of Newfoundland, spoke with hope that multi-aging would be the future in Newfoundland schools, but he remained cynical. While being interviewed about multi-age education Mulcahy was quoted as saying, "I would like to think it would be the future, but like any other form or

approach to education that is fundamentally child-centered, our system is generally hostile to that kind of approach to education" (Ducharme, 1998, p. 7).

The Present



Many different circumstances may serve as the basis of the initial implementation of multi-age programs in schools. Once introduced to the current multi-age approach to teaching some educators are very interested in learning more about it. According to Chase and Doan (1994) in *Full Circle A New Look At Multi-age Education*.



Renewed attention being given to the multi-age concept

The multi-age concept is receiving renewed attention because it allows educators to move toward a more developmentally appropriate educational program. It offers a reasonable solution to problems inherent in the outmoded practices of ability tracking and grade retention. The developmental philosophy encourages educators to address individual differences in children. As teachers



*Current approaches
in education go
hand in hand
with multi-age
grouping*

recognize individual differences, they realize that there is no graded curriculum appropriate for all students of a particular age. (p. 4)

Current approaches in education, such as the whole language approach to literacy and the problem solving approach to mathematics, make allowances for the fact that students progress at different levels and encourage student use of literacy and mathematics for real purposes. Thus, they go hand in hand in support of multi-age grouping as a valid environment for academic learning. Daniel and Terry recognize some of the current trends in education which are characteristic of the multi-age setting. They conclude that:

*In the multi-age
classroom, lots
of things are
happening
differently.*

*Daniel and
Terry*

In the multi-age classroom, lots of things are happening differently. Children can help children (peer tutoring) without fear of being accuse of cheating. Students get excited about learning because they do purposeful activities that are frequently hands-on. The children in a classroom become active participants in their own learning and help to collect materials and



- ✓ peer tutoring
- ✓ sense of purpose
- ✓ hands-on activities
- ✓ active participation
- ✓ excitement at learning

documentation for the evaluation and assessment of their own work (Pavan, 1992). Planning involves teachers and students. A variety of materials are in use, not just textbooks. Activities may be planned for whole group, small group, paired, or individual instruction. Students are excited about poetry, writing, math, and reading. Assessment is more authentic and casual and less threatening. Activity stations abound, and rows of desks are disappearing. Group and individual projects are filling the halls. Student work hangs everywhere in the classroom. A great deal of attention is directed toward the individual needs of each child. Teachers are facilitating and guiding, not directing all day. Children are once again becoming excited about learning! (Daniel & Terry, 1995, p. 9)

Daniel & Terry (1995) also examine why this approach works better in the multi-age classroom. They conclude that although it can happen in the single-grade classroom, "it won't be the same" (p. 9). The authors also concluded that there will be more pressure on passing the grade and less emphasis on cross-grade helping:



Writers won't be helping emergent writers. Readers won't be helping emergent readers. Brothers and sisters won't be helping siblings and "old" students won't be helping new students to become more familiar with a new environment and new processes. Children won't have the opportunity to learn and develop at their own rates without the ever-present concern about passing a given grade. (Daniel & Terry, 1995, p. 9)





Section Two

Getting Started: Commonly Asked Questions About Multi-age Education



For this section, a question-answer format has been chosen. These questions are based on the questions that teachers and others new to multi-age education most frequently ask.



Getting in the Swing!

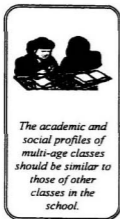


Multi-age education encourages the acceptance of individual differences and acknowledges that students are all individuals.

Question One: *Is multi-age education for all students?*

As far as can be ascertained, multi-age education should be offered to all students. The philosophy of multi-age education encourages the acceptance of individual differences and acknowledges the fact that students are all individuals who may be working at different levels. Kasten and Clarke (1993) are

supportive of this even though some misconceptions exist about this topic. They explain:



First of all, we feel that however the selection of students proceeds for the multi-age classes, those classes should be similar to other classes in the school in size and in academic and social profiles. We have discovered a common misconception circulating among parents and teachers is that multi-age classes contain either all the gifted children or the lower achieving students. Neither is true nor appropriate. Educators have long known that grouping children with others of very similar abilities is counterproductive, at best, to most students, and can have dire consequences. (p. 42)

Kasten and Clarke (1993) state firmly: "There is no type of child for whom this setting would be educationally inappropriate. There are others for whom this setting might be optimum" (p. 43).

Kasten and Clarke (1993) also explain that they have learned from some of their local schools that when beginning to implement multi-age models, "it is

extremely helpful to create the first multi-age classes with a core of students from the teacher's class the previous year" (p. 43).

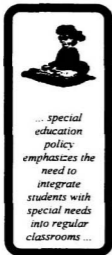
The principals who responded to the survey for this handbook project indicated that parental choice dictates which students will be placed in the multi-age classes in their schools. At times students' names have had to be drawn for multi-age classes because of the high amount of interest. When this happens, preference is given to siblings of children already in the class. These practices, followed by the principals who responded to the survey, are supportive of the Defining Characteristics of Multi-age Continuous Progress Education which are stated in the draft copy of *Multi-age Policy Handbook* for District #3.





Question Two: *Do special education students and special education teachers have a place in multi-age classrooms?*

This is reflective of a long debated question in the field of education. The question of the placement of special needs children and children needing remedial help has existed for a long time. During the seventies in a school in Corner Brook all the seven year olds with learning and/or behavioral problems were put together in the one classroom with one teacher. This class may have been smaller in numbers but, according to a teacher who was teaching in such a class at the time, this group was very challenging to work with. One aspect she found particularly frustrating was the fact that there were no consistently good role models among the students. This meant that other children could not benefit from role models available in regular classrooms. This teacher's experience is certainly supportive of the special education policy developed by the Department of



Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, which emphasizes the need to integrate students with special needs into regular classrooms.

In speaking with special education teachers currently working in District #3, they point out that there is a need for integration of special needs students; however there are certain times and circumstances which dictate the need for working with a student one on one in a quiet environment which may mean removal from the classroom setting for a given period of time. This is not promoting constant 'pull out' of certain students; instead, it promotes the importance of assessing the ever changing needs of students as individuals.



Having a specialist teacher visit a classroom to observe and work with students who have been identified as having learning and/or behavioral problems can prove very beneficial to the classroom teacher. The



current special education policy is also supportive of this practice. It is beneficial for classroom teachers to be able to avail of the expertise of specialists who have more training and usually more experience than the classroom teacher in dealing with various learning and/or behavioral problems.

Having a specialist visit the classroom to work with certain students does not have to mean that these children are segregated from their peers. If it is explained to the group that the specialist teacher will sometimes be working with the class, the students will probably accept it as another teacher in the classroom to help them. In a typical multi-age classroom setting where students are used to working in various group settings such as individually, in small groups with various classmates, and large group activities, the presence of another teacher will not stand out. There should be no problem for the classroom teacher and specialist

In a typical multi-age classroom setting, the presence of another teacher should not stand out.

teacher to work as professionals who discretely ensure that the specialist's time in the classroom is spent with the students who need his or her expertise.



*.. easier transition
if using whole
language and
classroom
workshop*

Question Three: *Who should teach multi-age classes?*

The most important criteria for teaching in a multi-age setting are to have at least a basic understanding of what constitutes multi-age education and to have a commitment to its philosophy; that is, to be committed to individualized hands-on learning and the development of the whole child. It will be an easier transition if you are accustomed to using whole language and classroom workshop approaches since they are very much characteristic of the multi-age classroom. Thus, teachers already using these approaches would be best suited for assignments to teach multi-age classes. It is noteworthy that in the surveys conducted, the respondents indicated that their teaching

methodologies did not significantly change when they switched from teaching a single grade class to a multi-age class. Therefore, it is probable that these teachers were indeed using the aforementioned approach prior to teaching in the multi-age setting.

The most important criteria for teaching in a multi-age setting are to have a basic understanding of what constitutes multi-age education and to have a commitment to its philosophy.

Teachers involved in the initial set-up of multi-age classrooms must be willing to accept the fact that, as with introducing and setting up any new program, there is a lot of work which must be done initially. They must also be able to accept the fact that not everyone will be open to the idea of implementing the multi-age approach to teaching. This includes not only parents but also teachers. As Grant and Johnson(1995) state:

This kind of major change is difficult and can be threatening to many people. We've talked with older teachers who are near retirement and candidly admit they haven't the energy to make such changes. We have talked to teachers who, having been slapped down hard for some earlier change, will never risk another. There are teachers who not only don't want to change

but who don't want to see anyone else succeed for fear the same program will then be forced on them. These teachers may not want to teach multi-age, but those who do need to make the effort to enlist their good will. (p. 61)



All the principals who responded to the survey indicated that they rely on teacher choice to decide on which teachers are assigned to teach the multi-age classes in their schools. Grant and Johnson (1995) confirm that "One pitfall is requiring teachers to take on a multi-age continuous progress program" (p. 40). When assigning the role of multi-age teacher, the principal needs to keep in mind that teachers who enjoy their teaching assignment are more likely to succeed.



Question Four: *Will I have to change my teaching methods?*

If a teacher is using the approaches addressed in question #3, changes to their teaching methods should be minimal. Overall survey results from teachers who

responded indicate that teachers in a multi-age classroom feel that a minimum amount of change in the teaching methods is needed from a traditional to a multi-age classroom. In fact, since changing from being a single grade classroom teacher to being a multi-age classroom teacher, the respondents indicated that they:

- ⇒ use 16 of the 18 Instructional Strategies listed in the survey to the same degree or more often
- ⇒ use 1 of the 1 methods of Parental Communication listed in the survey to the same degree or more often
- ⇒ use 6 of the 6 Curriculum Planning methods listed in the survey to the same degree or more often
- ⇒ use 11 of the 12 Classroom Organization techniques listed in the survey to the same degree or more often
- ⇒ use 3 of the 3 Rules and Routines listed in the survey to the same degree or more often
- ⇒ use 15 of the 18 methods of Assessment listed in the survey to the same degree or more often



One teacher noted on the survey that teachers considering teaching in the multi-age setting need to be (as all teachers should) cognizant that "the role of any teacher is to take each individual child from where they are to as far as they can go in all areas."



Question Five: *How can I become more familiar with multi-age education?*

Additional Resources:

- reading material available at District Office
- Internet sites
- visits to established multi-age classrooms
- summer institutes
- videos

In addition to reading this handbook, teachers may also read *A Multi-age User Guide: From Theory to Practice* by K. M. Hatcher (available from District #3), and the draft of the *Multi-age Policy Handbook* which was developed during the 1999-2000 school year by a committee put in place by District #3. It is noteworthy that Section E of District #3's Multi-age Education Policy handbook draft contains an exhaustive list of Internet resources, articles and a review of the research. Two of the teachers who responded to the



*Additional
Resources*

survey suggest that interested teachers visit a multi-age classroom to observe and chat with the students and teacher. One respondent also suggested talking with parents of children attending a multi-age class. Going on-line could also provides a wealth of information about multi-age education. Sites such as <http://www.chimacum.webnet.edu/multiage/> are particularly helpful. The e-mail address, listpro@servicesdesestatemous, will connect you with an Internet discussion group, a listserv, centered on multi-age education. Additional options include participate in summer institutes, attend conferences and/or purchase professional development resources such as videos, journal subscriptions, books, etc.



The following list contains some suggested reading sources to strengthen your knowledge of the history behind multi-age education:

Ducharme, J. (1988, November 18). Multi-age education: the theory. The Humber Log, p. 7.

Goodlad, J. I., & Anderson, R. W. (1963). The nongraded elementary school (Rev. Ed.) New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc.

Miller, R. (1976). The nongraded school: Analysis and study. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Noseworthy, W. (1970). The nongraded school. Unpublished manuscript, University of Newfoundland at St. John's.

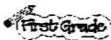


Question Six: *Is it better to start teaching two grade levels rather than three grade levels?*

Teaching two, rather than three grade levels, is debatable; however, it is interesting to note that eighty percent of the teachers who responded to our survey started by teaching 2 grades in the multi-age setting. It is also noteworthy that Kasten and Clarke (1993) suggest that "for teachers trying a multi-age class for the first time, a grouping of two grade levels may be an

easier transition than taking on three grade levels" (p.43).

In addition to this they explain that:



From some of our local schools that are beginning to implement multi-age models, we have learned that it is extremely helpful to create the first multi-age classes with a core of students from the teacher's class the previous year. ...We have also discovered that it is somewhat easier for many teachers to go up in grade level (such as a second grade teacher moving into a two/three) rather than going down in grade level (as in a third grade teacher moving into a two/three). Teachers need to adjust their expectations, and it seems to be somewhat easier to look forward. (Kasten & Clarke, 1993, pp. 43-44)

It should also be noted that District #3's Multi-age Education Policy Handbook (draft) states that "while it is possible to have multi-age combinations of two-age/two-grade, a multi-age continuous progress organization works better with a full primary unit (1-2-3 or K-1-2-3) and a full elementary unit (4-5-6)." (p.4)



Question Seven: *Who should be involved when planning the initial set-up?*

All stakeholders should be included in information sessions. This includes all staff members and parents. Substitute teachers should also be considered and not overlooked. District #3 has offered multi-age institutes during the past three summers. These sessions have been open to both permanent teachers and substitute teachers in School District #3 and, depending on space available, invitations have been issued to other school districts in the province. In fact, a teacher from Ontario heard about these workshops and arranged to attend.



Stakeholders include:

- ✓parents
- ✓principals
- ✓vice-principals
- ✓classroom
- ✓teachers
- ✓special education teachers
- ✓guidance
- councillors
- ✓specialist teachers

Grant and Johnson (1995) caution that:

An enthusiastic, supportive principal is vital to introducing a multi-age program into a school. The principal's leadership is needed to pave the way for cooperation, for parent understanding, for the materials and scheduling that will make it work.

An enthusiastic, supportive principal is vital to introducing a multi-age program into a school.



If a teacher doesn't have an administrator who is going to give support and be an advocate for the program, s/he should think carefully about pushing ahead with major changes. (p. 62)

All of the principals who responded to the survey are very supportive of multi-age education. All viewed the characteristics of multi-age continuous classrooms listed on the survey as being advantageous to student learning. One principal views it advantageous that multi-age classes help to ensure that there is more focus on curriculum outcomes than textbooks. Another principal stated that additional advantages include the fact that the students in multi-age classes display a greater tolerance for differences and are more cooperative. There was only one disadvantage stated on the surveys received from the principals: that is, that it is disadvantageous to students who leave the school before they complete the program, especially if the

student has not been given the opportunity to be amongst the oldest in the class.

When questioned why their schools decided to implement multi-age classes, one principal responded that "multi-age classes have certain advantages and the element of choice should be available for parents." Another principal stated that they decided to implement it simply because they liked the philosophy behind it. Two of the principals who responded also mentioned that multi-age classes do help to "address the 'numbers' crunch", but that they see a broader value in multi-age grouping. While addressing the issue of numbers may be a factor in implementing multi-age classrooms, it should not be the primary reason for doing so. If a 'numbers crunch' needs to be addressed but multi-age education is not supported, multi-grade classes should be set up instead.



Question Eight: *What pitfalls might be encountered?*

2

1

Pitfall 1

One pitfall to be avoided was already referred to above in the discussion of who should teach multi-age classes; that is when teachers are forced to take on a multi-age-continuous progress program. In fact Grant and Johnson (1995):

Recommend that principals have approximately 75% of the entire staff on board in favour of the concept before converting the school to multi-age - a big order. This does not mean all 75% will begin teaching a multi-age classroom. It does mean three-quarters of the staff are sympathetic to the idea and will help and support the teachers who initiate it. If there is one isolated group in the school going off and doing multi-age and the rest of the staff feels uncomfortable and unkindly toward this 'experiment', community support will be undermined. (p. 40)



Appendix 1 provides a questionnaire which may be helpful for teachers wanting to teach multi-age classes in a school where there are none currently in place. The

survey could help indicate how supportive their staff is in general.

Other words of caution from Grant and Johnson

(1995) are expressed in the following excerpt:



Pitfall 2



A second serious pitfall is waiting to introduce this change to parents until just before the school begins to implement it. Having the parents understand the concept and be ready to try it is imperative. Giving parents as well as staff time to accept this new concept and letting them choose whether or not they want to participate are the keys to developing support. As a school converts to multi-age, it should seriously consider doing it in phases, offering single grades as well as looping and multi-age configurations. This offers parents some choice and an opportunity to think about what is best for their child.

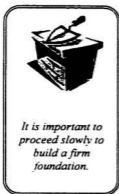


Pitfall 3



Another pitfall is jumping (or getting pushed) into a multi-age continuous progress program without enough preparation or materials. Teachers need the kind of support that includes release time to visit model multi-age classrooms and see them in operation. (p. 41)

It is noteworthy that one of the teachers who responded to the survey also cautioned against the






previous pitfall. The teacher surveyed advises that teachers should be wholly committed to multi-age education and not just accept the role of being a multi-age teacher to satisfy a principal's demands.

Interestingly, all principals who responded to the survey also recognized the importance of going slowly and building a firm foundation. This foundation according to the principals surveyed, includes providing parent education, teacher in-service and support for teachers in their efforts.



Pitfall 4

One principal who responded also cautions that it is necessary to be well organized and gives the following suggestions:

-  monitor progress thoroughly
-  plan your curriculum over the time frame
-  get furniture with adjustable legs to accommodate the growing children



Question Nine: *What is the role of specialist teachers working with a multi-age class?*

Kasten and Clarke (1993) caution that when planning to implement multi-age education in a school all stakeholders should be involved. They state that:



When changes occur, in any way, shape, or form, all school personnel are affected. Special teachers of music, art, physical education, special education, and other areas of specialty need to be included as well in the in-services. These teachers like their peers, have also become accustomed to teaching children of unit-aged classes. They may have organized curriculum around developmental experiences and be uncertain how to adapt to change. Thus it is important for multi-age teachers and special area teachers to collaborate and work together especially when initially implementing multi-age programming. They need to work together to address the needs unique to their school. Scheduling and special education issues such as how special education teachers and multi-age teachers work together need to be addressed in a similar manner to how those issues are addressed for single-graded classes.(p. 45)



Keep the lines of communication open between multi-age and special area teachers



Thus, it is important for multi-age teachers and specialist teachers to collaborate and work together especially when initially implementing multi-age education programming. For example, multi-age teachers and special education teachers need to deal with such issues as scheduling and determining how special education teachers can most effectively work in a multi-age environment. Because continuous progress is an essential aspect of multi-age education, children work toward achieving individual goals and outcomes within the prescribed curriculum. Special education teachers, as with all specialist teachers, will need to understand the concept of continuous progress as it relates to each child they serve. Kasten and Clarke (1993) also point out that specialist teachers should keep in mind that:

...outside of schools, children's activities are not set up in age-segregated fashion, but rather by groupings similar to multi-



age classes. Girl Scouts and Guides, Boy Scouts and Guides, and children who belong to community sporting events are also grouped with several age ranges. Similarly, children who attend group dancing lessons, martial arts instruction, or other after-school activities are not segregated by grade level. (p. 45)

Politano and Davies (1994) suggest the following two ways to facilitate appropriate activities for physical education classes for children of all ages in multi-age classes:

Centres: Establish safety criteria for using equipment in the gym. Make sure all students know and understand the rules and regulations before you allow them access to the equipment set out in several centres around the gym.



Zones: Divide the gym into three clearly marked zones. For example, create a space for indoor hockey; another space for activities that use small equipment (such as scooter boards, scoops, and ropes); and a third area for ball activities such as indoor soccer. (p. 67)

It is interesting that these suggestions by

Politano and Davies echo the suggestions of a local

physical education teacher who was consulted to see how he approached teaching multi-age classes. This local physical education teacher explained that he finds that this approach works well not only with multi-age classes but also with single grade classes.





Section Three

The Importance of Communicating the Concept of Multi-age Continuous Progress Education





As with the implementation of any program which deviates from the perceived "norm", good, open communication is essential towards establishing a firm foundation. Clearly communicating the background behind the concept of multi-age education is of utmost importance. All of the stakeholders need have a clear vision of its evolution, research outcomes, and implementation processes. One of the challenges in initially implementing any program is attempting to minimize misconceptions.

Misconceptions About Multi-age Education



The successful implementation of a multi-age continuous progress classroom is often dependent on alleviating the fears and misconceptions that parents and others have about the nature of the concept. There are many misconceptions about multi-age

education and it is crucial that teachers and schools work to introduce a multi-age progress program to deal with these effectively.



Daniel and Terry also address some of the misinformation, misconceptions and obstacles which are associated with multi-age education. They state:

As you begin to work with the multi-age classroom concept, you will find that some people will have misconceptions about multi-age grouping. Lodish (1992) describes the following four common misconceptions:



1. Multi-age vertical groups are less structured than single-grade horizontal ones.



2. Mixed-age classrooms are meant to equalize children of different ages and abilities. The younger child in a mixed-age class will be "stretched" more than in a single-age class.



3. The younger child in a mixed-age class will be "stretched" more than in a single-age class.



4. Once children begin a mixed-age in the lower of two grades, they must



stay with the class for the second year.


In response, let us look at each item. First, the multi-age organization actually requires more, not less, organization because the teacher must plan and organize for the individual needs of each child, teaching the child first. Second, this type of classroom offers students who represent a wide range of rates of progress abilities the opportunity to interact and work together. Third, all students can be challenged when the curriculum is equally demanding at all levels and addresses individual academic levels and learning styles. Fourth, as mentioned earlier, if student-teacher problems arise, a change in place may be a consideration. Some schools, recognizing that not all students learn best in the same environment, have kept some traditional classrooms. In some cases, placement in a traditional, horizontally structured classroom may be an option for the next year for a student (Lodish, 1992). (Daniel & Terry, 1995, pp. 51-52)

It is important to note these misconceptions yet being informed about multi-age education helps teachers overcome and sometimes prevent the spread of such misconceptions. This section provides some

direction for teachers in communicating the concept to parents and other teachers.



Communicating the Concept to Parents

 The principals who responded to the survey indicate that their schools use methods to inform parents about the multi-age program which are similar to those described in research findings. That is, parents can become informed about the concept of multi-age education through school newsletters, invitations to visit already established multi-age classes, videos of actual multi-age classrooms, and information sessions pertaining to multi-age education.

Success or failure often hinges on whether parents have been adequately informed and involved.

Communication between home and school is of utmost importance. The success or failure of any new venture often hinges on whether parents have been adequately informed about the concept and involved in



- newsletters
- classroom visits
- videos
- information sessions



its implementation. This is certainly true when it comes to introducing multi-age teaching . There are many options open to a school desirous of enlightening and educating parents: for example, schools could make effective use of parent-teacher organizations and guest speakers, or conduct panel discussions, use audio-visuals, and provide written material such as brochures or a handbook. The *Multi-age Policy Handbook* for District #3 contains many appropriate articles on which to draw including an example of how to conduct a parent information session. It also addresses many questions which are frequently asked by parents.

Once a decision has been taken to establish a multi-age classroom, it is important to continue to keep the lines of communication open between home and school. Frequently inviting parents to the classroom to observe how routines operate, the ways in which children are taught to work together, and how programs



Keep the lines
of
communication
open

are established is important to the successful implementation of a multi-age classroom. At times when parents are invited to visit, their questions can be answered through observation, by children or by the teacher(s).

Grant and Johnson encourage the consideration of the following important points which were also noted as important by the principals who responded to the survey conducted prior to the development of this handbook *The Establishment of Multi-age Education -- Then and Now*. These points include the fact that:

The challenge, of course, is that students' families must understand the program. When a multi-age program is introduced, it should not be a "this or nothing" program in the school. Within the school, there should be room for parent choice....

...Particularly when the school is introducing a multi-age program, there need to be options. The parents should be able to choose to have their child a part of the program or not. By respecting the wishes of parents who refuse to consider



any change, the school avoids having these parents undermine and destroy community support...

...If a new program is not understood by everyone involved, word of mouth can be damaging. (Grant & Johnson, 1995, p. 73)



*Involving parents
brings home and
school together*

Miletta reported that she and her colleague found that having parents involved in their children's classrooms was an excellent way to bring home and school together. They would offer parents the opportunity to be involved in consultations about the organization of subject matter and classroom management if they would be willing to volunteer. Miletta (1996) states:

We wanted students to understand that the school was not separated from real life and that the skills, attitudes and understandings they were gaining were connected to the world outside the school. Parents not only provided alternative role models for our students, they also increased the ratio of adults in the classroom and the number of choices available for the children. (p. 82)

In the book Creating Nongraded K-3 Classrooms: Teachers' Stories and Lessons Learned it is explained that although in some states in the United States, multi-age programs have become mandatory and thus parents aren't given a choice about whether their child is placed in a multi-age program, these schools still need to inform parents about the program. For example, as Bridget Baker and Lisa Smith, teachers at Ward Chapel Elementary Bell County School, explain, before initial implementation of a primary level multi-age program:



Parents were introduced to the concepts of 'primary' through letters, personal contacts, and Parent-Teacher Organization meetings. All kindergarteners and first and second graders took home report cards that said 'promoted to primary program' with a note explaining this concept again to parents. Teachers also spent time explaining the upcoming changes to their students.

As teachers we worked to create an interest in our pilot primary program. We created a primary program logo. This logo was on every piece of correspondence that went into homes and into the community.



We also created weekly progress reports that all students took home on Friday and that parents signed and returned on Monday. This was an attempt to assure a continuous exchange of information between the school and the home....

...The primary staff also solicited parents and the community at large for help in developing our thematic units. Parents and others from the community volunteered and gave school demonstrations for the students. We also developed unit-related home activities that parents and children could complete together. For example, one assignment was for each family to discuss what their children are suppose to do in case of fire and to have a mock fire drill at their home. (Baker and Smith, 1996, p. 128)

Keep parents up-to-date. For example:

Bottom Line:

Parents need to be informed



Begin each month by writing a general letter to parents about such topics as theme work, projects, and special events in which your class is involved.



Each week or month students may make a picture or write a letter to their parents explaining the various themes and/or projects with which they are currently involved.



Invite parents in for students to present current projects.



Invite parents to volunteer to help students with art projects, cooking projects, or other such projects.



Invite parents to visit the classroom on a regular basis to read to the students or listen to the students read, or to help the class in the computer lab or resource centre. The practice of activities such as these help develop relations between parents and teachers.

Communicating the Concept to and Amongst Staff Members



Even once multi-age classes are set up and progressing well, it is a good idea to promote regular communication among all the professional staff. One way is to extend an open invitation to visit your classroom to those who are curious about its setup or dubious about the success and merit of multi-age education.





- ✓ *extend open invitations for class visits*
- ✓ *meet to discuss issues*
- ✓ *keep talking and exchanging ideas*

Regular communication should be kept amongst teachers who are working with the multi-age classes, including the physical education and music teachers. Meeting with the physical education and music teachers to address any concerns about or observations made about the dynamics of the set up of the multi-age classes would not need to happen as often as for the classroom multi-age teachers to meet together as a group. Especially for teachers beginning to teach in a multi-age setting, it is nice to have a group of colleagues with whom to plan and exchange ideas. Talking with other colleagues can help validate some of your new teaching methods and routines you are developing for the multi-age classroom setup.

The primary level multi-age teachers at Ward Chapel Elementary School in Kentucky, U.S.A., really value planning together. In fact, they meet regularly for planning sessions.



At 7:30 a.m. the ten members of the primary team are in the library meeting for their common planning time. The teachers work together until 8:00 for the agenda for the week, which is prepared by one of the teachers, a responsibility they rotate weekly. The agenda includes discussion of unit activities, special needs students, reports, deadlines, and upcoming meetings. ...Throughout the day the teachers often meet in pairs as they team teach or work together in the afternoons after the children have gone home. (Baker & Smith, 1996, p. 114)



Conclusion



If you are about to become a multi-age teacher, do not forget that multi-age education has been evolving since ancient times. It's evolution has been, and continues to be, slow but steady - grounded in sound pedagogy. Some useful advice for teachers who are just setting up a multi-age class is:



...among the lessons learned about change are that change is easier if educators collaborate with one another, and the best way to know how and what to change about instruction is to observe and respond to the children. Finally all educators can come to accept that change occurs gradually. (Hovda, Kyle, and McIntyre, 1996, p. 183)



It is important to continue to maintain an open dialogue with all stakeholders. Planning can be made easier by exchanging ideas with colleagues.

Examination of the history behind multi-age education clearly reveals that it is well grounded as a sound pedagogy. While the popularity of the graded system still permeates our school systems, teachers

who choose to teach in multi-age settings should not be discouraged. Keeping good communication lines open is key to help the establishment of, and preservation of, multi-age education.



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APPENDIX 1

**Questionnaire:
How Strong Is the Support System in
Your School?**

Questionnaire from Grant & Johnson

How Strong Is the Support System in Your School?

The following questionnaire has been adapted from one developed by Irv Richardson, principal and multiage teacher at Mast Landing School in Freeport, Maine.

	To Whom Would You go if You ...	Who Would Come to You if They ...
*need help planning a unit?		
*need some new ideas for teaching a lesson?		
*need some extra materials to teach a lesson next period?		
*want a colleague to observe your teaching?		
*want to co-teach a unit?		
*want to share a successful lesson?		
*want another opinion about something a student has done?		
*need someone to take a duty for you on short notice?		
*had a problem with a family and needed to talk about it?		
*had a bad day and needed to talk about it?		
*had a problem with another teacher?		
*needed help with strategies to work with a particularly difficult student?		
*needed someone to watch your class for a few minutes?		
*had concerns about a change that was happening in your school?		
*had a great idea about how to improve your school?		

REPRODUCIBLE PAGE

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter contains a brief summary and discussion of the findings of this study. This study is concerned with the implementation of multi-age education programs. The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the history behind multi-age education?
2. What steps need to be taken to successfully establish multi-age education programs?

Data for analysis were collected from four sources: research literature, surveys, my personal experiences and observations as a multi-age teacher in District #3. The data was analysed, synthesized and reflected upon during the development of a handbook for teachers. This handbook is presented in Chapter 4.

Discussion of Findings

Both the early and current research literature suggest that multi-age teaching is very beneficial. It has existed since the beginning of formal education and can be linked to many famous educators over the centuries. Multi-age education certainly has the potential to prepare students to become independent, life-long learners who can successfully confront and contend with new technologies and the demands of the modern information age.

Implications for Practice

The present research has a number of practical implication with respect to multi-age education.

1. It is possible to successfully set up multi-age education programs in District #3.
2. School administration supportive of multi-age education is essential for successful multi-age education programs.
3. All stakeholders must be informed about multi-age education prior to its establishment.
4. Continuous open communication among staff members, parents and community members is essential.
5. Chat groups for teachers and chat groups for parents involved in multi-age education are beneficial.
6. Teachers who are accustomed to using whole language and classroom workshop approaches are best suited for assignments to teach in the multi-age classroom.

Implications for Further Research

The present research could be seen as providing the impetus for others to conduct further study of multi-age education. The following four items are suggested as areas where such research could enhance our understanding of this educational strategy.

1. This study surveyed 4 schools. Research could be conducted in all schools in School District #3 who are implementing multi-age education.

2. School District #3 could investigate how multi-age is being implemented in other school districts.
3. There are administrative concerns in implementing multi-age education. This study does not attempt to address these concerns. There is need for an additional handbook for administrators.
4. Special education programming is not considered in this project. It would be desirable for School District #3 to develop a handbook dealing with needs in special education.

Concluding Comments

The research results of this project clearly indicate that classes reflecting the philosophy of multi-age education programs have existed for a very long time. The fact that multi-age education is currently being implemented, at least on a small scale, in the immediate Corner Brook area signifies that support for multi-age education continues to exist. The result of this project, entitled *The Establishment of Multi-age Education -- Then and Now*, should help in the implementation, preservation and perseverance of multi-age education.

Having developed this project, I am now better able to explain the philosophy to others new to the approach. Refreshing the history brings authenticity to the argument for multi-age education. I have enjoyed revisiting the historical background and sharing it in a handbook with new users.

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Appendix A
Graduate Studies Project Guidelines

Graduate Studies Project Guidelines

Graduate Studies Project

A project is the creation of a theoretically based product intended for possible use in educational settings and is normally undertaken after or near the completion of course work. The purpose of a project is to provide a graduate student with an opportunity to translate theoretical knowledge into practice by:

- recognizing and articulating an educational need to which current and relevant theoretical and pedagogical knowledge can be applied;
- developing and justifying an alternative approach to address the educational need based on theoretical and pedagogical knowledge; and
- creating a product that could be used to implement this alternative approach.

The project report would consist of the product plus the articulated need, theoretical basis, justification of the approach used, and a complete description of the product. The project report must meet the requirements of academic rigor and be written and presented in accord with the most recent edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) Guidelines. The average length of a project report would be sixty (60) pages or 15,000 words (this may vary given the nature of the product, such as an articulated policy; a CD-ROM; a computer program; a developed unit of work; a kit of learning resources; manipulatives; multimodal text; photographs; a tape; a set of teaching cards; software; or a video). Regardless of the form of the product, there must be a written project report. In some cases, where a product is unsuitable for inclusion with the report, a demonstration of the product may be required.

PHASES

Phase One

1. To arrange for a University Supervisor, a graduate student has several options. The student may arrange a meeting with a Faculty member with expertise in the area of study to inquire about the prospect of working with that individual and to negotiate an interesting plan for a project. Alternatively, a meeting may be arranged with the Associate Dean, Graduate Programmes, to discuss options and potential supervisors. The ultimate responsibility to confirm a University Supervisor is that of the student. It is a responsibility to be undertaken when a student feels ready to do so.

2. When a graduate student and a faculty member have agreed to work together, each has a responsibility to the other (failure to maintain contact with your Supervisor(s) for more than a three month period, may terminate your agreement). No student should approach a faculty member with a proposal in-hand and expect carte blanche approval. No faculty member should have a student's proposal for more than two weeks without an informed response. The best project plan is one that is thought about, planned for, and decided upon by the graduate student, the University Supervisor, and in due course, the Field Supervisor (if the project necessitates working with a field-based person).
3. If your project requires you to work in the field (school, hospital, clinic, or agency) you may have to consider the following:
 - permission to have access to a school, hospital, clinic, or agency must be requested well in advance in order to allow time for approval;
 - some school boards stipulate three deadlines: September 15 for a fall placement; January 15 for a winter placement; and March 15 for a spring placement. A copy of the project proposal may be requested for examination and approval; and
 - if a school board, school, clinic, or agency has concerns about your proposal, these may be expressed to you and revisions for ethical and professional reasons may be necessary.

Please Note: All arrangements for supervision must be approved by the Associate Dean who will consult with the Supervisor(s).

Phase Two

4. A written preliminary proposal for the project must be submitted by the graduate student to the University Supervisor(s) prior to the initiation of the project. Students should submit only the best work possible in a thorough and professional manner even when it is only a draft. The proposal shall include the following:
 - a rationale for the project;
 - objectives of the project; and
 - components of the project.

The project proposal shall be contextualized within current pedagogical and theoretical literature and relevant to the graduate student's program specialization (citations, references, and other relevant inclusions shall be in accord with the most recent APA Guidelines).

5. After discussions about and revisions to the proposal have been completed and deemed acceptable by the University Supervisor(s), a copy of the approved project proposal should be filed with the Associate Dean of Graduate Programmes.

Please Note: The more thorough and clear your proposal, the more thorough and clear your project ceteris paribus.

Phase Three

6. The fundamental principles of ethics, integrity, and professionalism must obtain, regardless of the route taken for completion of the requirements of a Master's program.

The University must abide by a Code of Ethics in the conduct of research and scholarship. Any research or scholarship involving human subjects must be approved by the Ethics Committee prior to the conduct of the work. A copy of the guidelines for research involving human subjects, may be obtained from the Office of the Associate Dean, Graduate Programs and Research (In the case of a project, it may not be necessary to seek ethics approval unless objectives of the project require same for the project report).

Students have a duty to maintain integrity and professionalism in all their work. Under the doctrine of fair use, students must acknowledge the work of others: paraphrase accurately to ensure the intent of the work(s) of others; represent the work of others in an honest and thorough manner; and be vigilant and guard against plagiarism.

Please Note: Ethics approval is a statement that the work proposed meets the guidelines established. It is not an approval of methodology, procedures, or practices proposed.

Phase Four

7. Responsibility for the ongoing supervision and completion of the project rests with both the graduate student and University Supervisor(s), nevertheless, the project and report is the student's work.

The University Supervisor(s) accepts responsibility to advise and guide in the selection and refinement of the topic; the scope and significance of topic to be developed; the analysis and synthesis of the research on the topic; the generalizations and specifics of the topic; the coherence and consistency of the ideas; the design and development of the product; and the preparation of the project report.

8. Graduate students should be cognizant of the need for many drafts before a project report is thorough and finessed enough to be considered finished. During the process of creating the product and project report, students should make appointments to meet with University Supervisor(s) and provide, at least two weeks in advance of an appointment, a copy of the work to be read or examined. Students have every right to expect an informed response to draft sections of their ongoing project work normally within two weeks. A University Supervisor(s) has every right to require any reasonable rewrites of the project within an agreed upon time frame: to require it to be produced/written in accord with APA Guidelines; and to require it to be consistent with the guidelines for submission from the School of Graduate Studies.

Phase Five

9. Neither the University Supervisor(s) nor the graduate student is to contact potential examiners. When the Office of the Associate Dean of Graduate Programmes is informed that a project report is ready for submission to the School of Graduate Studies, an examiner recommendation form will be forwarded to the Supervisor(s) for completion. School of Graduate Studies regulations governing the examination of graduate students' work will be upheld: "Examiners shall normally be those who have completed a graduate degree at the doctoral level, including a thesis/report, in the discipline or cognate area. Those serving as examiners shall not have been involved in the preparation of the thesis/report".

Phase Six

10. The University Supervisor(s) reviews the examiners' reports from the School of Graduate Studies and advises the graduate student on any revisions and/or critical decisions that may be necessary as a consequence of the examination. The student must make all revisions in accord with the examiners' and Supervisor(s)' advice. When the Supervisor(s) is satisfied with the edited and revised report, the student must resubmit the final project report to the Office of the Associate Dean of Graduate Programmes, and the University Supervisor will make a written recommendation for its acceptance.

Phase Seven

11. It is the responsibility of the graduate student to deliver an official bound copy of the final project report to the University Supervisor(s), in addition to those required by the University.



Appendix B

School District #3: Multi-age Continuous Progress: Policies, Guidelines and Procedure

Page 2

DEFINITION

Multi-age continuous progress education is a classroom organizational structure in which children of two or more age levels work together. In their everyday lives, children interact with people of all ages. Their lives are enriched by the many experiences they have and by the relationships they develop. Multi-age education is a natural and logical extension of children's home environments. Multi-age education is based on a belief that children will benefit from a learning environment that values diversity. In a classroom in which there is a wide range of ability, children's contributions to classroom life strengthen both their academic and social experiences.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

A multi-age continuous progress classroom, while similar in some respects to other classroom organizations, is different in the following ways:

- Children of different ages and abilities learn together, and this replicates the experiences they will have in the world outside of school. The vertical nature of multi-age classroom grouping encourages children to take on leadership and mentorship roles. Furthermore, children have a greater chance of finding other children who have similar interests and abilities.
- A multi-age continuous progress classroom enables children to experience being in the younger and older – and, quite often, the middle – positions in a classroom community that closely resembles a family.
- Siblings are encouraged to learn together in the same classroom.
- Because grade level boundaries are blurred and children learn at their own rates, continuous progress is possible.
- Where possible, teachers spend two or more years with the same children. Therefore, they come to know a fuller range of the prescribed curriculum. This enables teachers to see progress over the long term for each child and to suspend judgement until the end of a key stage.
- Teacher-parent communication may be enhanced because children may be with the same teacher for more than one year.
- When a teacher is able to be with children for more than one year, the teacher can use knowledge of the child from the previous year to plan for the following year thereby ensuring that no instructional time is lost and that instruction is appropriate for the child.
- Children become more familiar and comfortable with the routines of the classroom so that there is an easy transition into the new school year; furthermore, older children can help newcomers adapt to the classroom routines.

BELIEF STATEMENT

Based on what we know about children as learners, we recognize the need for learning to be holistic and appropriate for the learner. We believe that a multi-age continuous progress classroom provides for that kind of learning. It enables students of varying ages and abilities to develop the self-confidence to become a community of life-long, independent learners.

PRINCIPLES

A multi-age continuous progress classroom is based on the following principles:

- Learning is social; therefore, there should be many opportunities for social interaction and collaboration.
- The classroom should be a community in which children learn to empathize with and help others as well as to accept responsibility for their own actions.
- Children need time to think, to do, and to reflect; therefore, classroom time should be flexible to support these needs.
- Through continuous progress, the classroom learning environment should emphasize success for every student and to encourage children to see "mistakes" as opportunities to learn.
- The classroom should be a place where students feel valued and where an emphasis is placed on building self-esteem.
- In order for children to become life-long, independent learners and effective communicators, there should be an emphasis on both process and product.
- Children need opportunities to think critically and creatively and to engage in activities that require higher level thinking.
- Children are naturally curious; therefore, learning experiences should begin with children's interests and inquiries.
- In order to facilitate inquire-based, active learning, children require freedom of movement, freedom to interact and collaborate with others, and freedom to make choices about their learning.

POLICIES**CREATING THE MULTI-AGE CONTINUOUS PROGRESS CLASSROOM**

Policy Statement 1: The multi-age continuous progress class will consist of children of varying ages and abilities, and will span more than one year.
--

INTRODUCTION

A multi-age continuous progress classroom is a *community of learners* that replicates the world outside of school. In order to establish a true community of learners, children need to be together long enough to develop a sense of security and continuity. This sense of security and continuity is more strongly established when the teacher stays with the children for more than one year.

GUIDELINES

- A multi-age class will function better if the numbers are kept within a range that does not exceed twenty-three (23).
- A multi-age class needs to include children of different ages and abilities.
- A multi-age class should be as balanced as possible in terms of age, gender, ability, ethnicity, and achievement.
- In a multi-age class it is good practice to include siblings.
- While it is possible to have multi-age combinations of two-age two-grade, a multi-age continuous progress organization works better with a full primary unit (1-2-3 or K-1-2-3) and a full elementary unit (4-5-6).
- Every effort should be made to ensure that school scheduling for special events and for specialist teachers enable the multi-age classroom community to stay together.
- As far as is possible, children should stay together as a group with the same teacher. When the older group of children in the class move from primary to elementary, they should also move as a group.

Page 5

PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES

Information on practices and procedures related to Police Statement 1 is contained in the following sections of the District's handbook, *Multi-age Continuous Progress Education*:

- ☐ Information and awareness for principals, school staffs, and parents: *Sections A and B*
- ☐ Creating a multi-age continuous progress classroom: *Section C*
- ☐ Maintaining a multi-age class for the long term: *Sections A and C*

**CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
IN A MULTI-AGE CONTINUOUS PROGRESS CLASSROOM**

Policy Statement 2:	Curriculum and instruction in a multi-age continuous progress classroom will foster and reflect the holistic development of the learner.
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Policy Statement 3:	Curriculum and instruction in a multi-age continuous progress classroom will respect the uniqueness of each learner and enable each to achieve his/her full potential.
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Policy Statement 4:	The provincial curriculum outcomes will guide an integrated approach to curriculum planning and instruction in a multi-age continuous progress classroom
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Policy Statement 5:	Curricular and instructional planning in a multi-age continuous progress classroom will be the joint responsibility of children and the teacher. Parents also may be involved where appropriate.
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INTRODUCTION

In a multi-age continuous progress classroom, learners are the focus for instruction. Curriculum and instruction should begin with and build on the child's prior knowledge and experiences. By lifting the grade and disciplinary barriers, children are enabled to make connections between the curriculum and their own lives.

GUIDELINES

- ☐ Curriculum and instruction must ensure that learning involves all domains: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective. All aspects of development—personal, social, intellectual, physical, creative-aesthetic, and moral-spiritual—must be fostered.
- ☐ Curriculum and instruction are driven by the child's strengths, interests, and needs in relation to curricular outcomes.
- ☐ Every effort must be made to create an inter-disciplinary, integrated curricular structure that will enable children to make connections in their learning.

Page 7

PRACTICES

Information on practices and procedures related to Policy Statements 1-5 is contained in the following sections of the District's handbook. *Multi-age Continuous Progress Education*:

- ☐ Child-centered education: *Sections A, C and D*
- ☐ Building the curriculum: *Sections C, D, and E*

**ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION
IN A MULTI-AGE CONTINUOUS PROGRESS CLASSROOM**

Policy Statement 6:	Assessment and evaluation in a multi-age continuous progress classroom will follow provincial and district guidelines and procedures. It also will reflect the unique nature of curriculum organization and instruction in a multi-age classroom.
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INTRODUCTION

The principles that guide assessment and evaluation for all children in the District also guide the assessment and evaluation of children in multi-age classes.

GUIDELINES

Refer to curriculum documents from the Department of Education, and student evaluation documents from both the Department of Education and School District #3.

PRACTICES

Section D of the District's handbook, *Multi-age Continuous Progress Education*, contains information on assessment and evaluation practices and procedures.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Policy Statement 7: Teachers assigned to multi-age continuous progress classrooms must understand and be trained in multi-age philosophy and instructional practices

INTRODUCTION

The Belief Statement and Principles contained in this document (p.) should be the guide for teachers in the application of multi-age philosophy and instructional practices.

GUIDELINES

Teachers in multi-age classrooms should understand:

- ☐ that learning is social and collaborative
- ☐ the importance of establishing a community of learners
- ☐ the value of positive social relationships within the classroom community
- ☐ the classroom time and organization should be flexible
- ☐ the implications of continuous progress for instruction
- ☐ the nature of holistic and child-centered education that is inquiry-based
- ☐ the nature of an integrated, inter-disciplinary curriculum
- ☐ how to program for individual needs within the classroom
- ☐ how to create curriculum with children using provincial outcomes to guide the process
- ☐ how to use provincial and district assessment and evaluation guidelines in a multi-age setting

PRACTICES

Sections A and C of the District's handbook, *Multi-age Continuous Progress Education*, contains information on professional development practices and procedures.

Appendix C

Surveys

Dear Principals,

As part of our M.Ed. Program at Memorial University of Newfoundland, we are researching multi-age practices in order to complete a Handbook for Multi-age Classroom Teachers in our School District 3. We would appreciate it, if you could take a few minutes to complete our questionnaire and return it by fax Attention: Liz Elder (709) 639-1496 or in the self-addressed envelope. If more convenient, please go on-line and complete our questionnaire at <http://www.sd3.k12.nf.ca/project/survey/>

We are hoping to have all surveys returned by June 19th, 2000.

Thank you in advance.

Marie Hatcher and Liz Elder

School District: _____

Community: _____

Please indicate by checking (✓) the appropriate block if you view the following characteristics of multi-age continuous progress classrooms as being advantages or disadvantages.

	Advantage	Disadvantage
Children of different ages and abilities learn together.		
Children stay with the same teacher for more than one year.		
Children are familiar with the routines of the classroom at the beginning of a new school year.		
Siblings are encouraged to learn together in the same classroom.		
Because grade level boundaries are blurred, children's learning is not confined to grade level expectations.		
In the second or third year of a multi-age classroom, children have opportunities to be leaders and mentors		

Additional Advantages	Additional Disadvantages

Why did you decide to implement multi-age classes in your school?

How does your school inform parents of the multi-age program?

What procedure do you use to decide which students will be placed in the multi-age classes?

How do you decide which teachers are assigned multi-age classrooms?

What suggestions would you make to help others in implementing a multi-age classroom?
Please list them below.

Dear Parents,

As part of our M.Ed. Program at Memorial University of Newfoundland, we are researching multi-age practices in order to complete a Handbook for Multi-age Classroom Teachers in our School District 3. We would appreciate it, if you could take a few minutes to complete our questionnaire and return it by fax Attention: Liz Elder (709) 639-1496 or in the self-addressed envelope. If more convenient, please go on-line and complete our questionnaire at <http://www.sd3.k12.nf.ca/project/survey/>

We are hoping to have all surveys returned by June 19th, 2000.

Thank you in advance,

Marie Hatcher and Liz Elder

General Information:

School: _____ Community: _____

Please indicate by checking (✓) the appropriate block if you view the following characteristics of multi-age continuous progress classrooms as being advantages or disadvantages.

	Advantage	Disadvantage
Children of different ages and abilities learn together.		
Children stay with the same teacher for more than one year.		
Children are familiar with the routines of the classroom at the beginning of a new school year.		
Siblings are encouraged to learn together in the same classroom.		
Because grade level boundaries are blurred, childrens' learning is not confined to grade level expectations.		
In the second or third year of a multi-age classroom, children have the opportunities to be leaders and mentors		

Additional Advantages	Additional Disadvantages

Please briefly explain why you decided to place your child in a multi-age class.

Would you prefer to keep your child in a multi-age class?

Do you have any suggestions for schools that are considering setting up a multi-age class? If so, please list them below.

Dear Teachers,

As part of our M.Ed. Program at Memorial University of Newfoundland, we are researching multi-age practices in order to complete a Handbook for Multi-age Classroom Teachers in our School District 3. We would appreciate it, if you could take a few minutes to complete our questionnaire and return it by fax Attention: Liz Elder (709) 639-1496 or in the self-addressed envelope. If more convenient, please go on-line and complete our questionnaire at <http://www.sd3.k12.nf.ca/project/survey/>

We are hoping to have all surveys returned by June 19th, 2000.

Thank you in advance,

Marie Hatcher and Liz Elder

School District: _____

Class configuration (e.g. K-1, K-1-2, 1-2-3) _____

Community: _____

Please indicate by checking (✓) the appropriate block if you view the following characteristics of multi-age continuous progress classrooms as being advantages or disadvantages.

	Advantage	Disadvantage
Children of different ages and abilities learn together.		
Children stay with the same teacher for more than one year.		
Children are familiar with the routines of the classroom at the beginning of a new school year.		
Siblings are encouraged to learn together in the same classroom.		
Because grade level boundaries are blurred, children's learning is not confined to grade level expectations.		
In the second or third year of a multi-age classroom, children have the opportunities to be leaders and mentors		

Additional Advantages	Additional Disadvantages

Please indicate why you decided to teach a multi-age class?

- (a) I was assigned the role.
- (b) I was asked if I was interested in having the role.
- (c) I asked if I could be assigned the role.
- (d) I initiated the implementation of a multi-age classroom in my school.

(e) Other: _____

What suggestions do you have for other teachers who are considering multi-age teaching?
Please list them below.

Since changing from being a single grade classroom teacher to being a multi-age classroom teacher, what degree of change (if any) has occurred in your instructional strategies and your approach to curriculum planning, classroom organization, rules and routines, assessment, and parental communication?

	A	B	C	D	E
	Less Often	To The Same Degree	More Often	Stopped Using	Started Using
I. Instructional Strategies					
1. I model reading, writing and listening daily					
2. I introduce reading and writing simultaneously as an integrated part of the curriculum, not just at assigned times					
3. I schedule independent reading and writing workshops each day					
4. I develop in children an awareness of phonics and other skills through interaction with meaningful text (e.g., various genres at varying levels from picture books to chapter books)					
5. I use basal readers as a resource for multiple copies of stories					
6. I provide activities for creative expression to also be developed through language arts, art, music, drama, dance, and movement					
7. I give time for daily journal writing in order to document progress in the writing process, note students' social and emotional development, and practice various types of daily writing					
8. I use our school library, public library, book clubs, donations, children's published books, etc., to provide a continuous stream of print materials in my classroom					

	Less Often	To The Same Degree	More Often	Stopped Using	Started Using
9. I use a resource-based approach to teaching					
10. I give students opportunities to explore, investigate, question and research their environment and lives: <i>this information is used as a foundation</i> for language arts, mathematics, science and social studies					
11. I use questioning and exploring as a daily event					
12. Mathematical concepts of sorting, classifying, ordering/seriation, matching, patterning with concrete materials are fully developed before entry into paper / pencil tasks					
13. Numeration, geometry, measurement and graphing concepts are developed through manipulation of concrete materials and are understood by the children before they move to abstract and symbolic reasoning					
14. Various groupings of students occurs					
15. Roles within the groups change allowing children to experience different responsibilities within different group settings					
16. I invite community and field expert representatives to visit the class					
17. I use the available technology as a tool for learning not as a substitute for work sheets or an electronic textbook					
18. I use word processing as one means for students to write, edit and rewrite stories, reports, etc.					
II. Curriculum Planning					
19. I cut across subject matter to teach and reinforce skills					

	Less Often	To The Same Degree	More Often	Stopped Using	Started Using
20. I use broad based themes (e.g. "Beginnings." "Changes") to provide a springboard to develop a series of topical themes (e.g. "Dinosaurs." "Seeds") that connect together					
21. I use topical themes to integrate and guide the curriculum (e.g. the concepts, objectives and skills introduced would revolve around a topical theme such as seeds)					
22. I design and assign projects allowing children to show what they know as well as what they can do with what they know					
23. I allow students' interests to influence the themes and project selection					
24. I allow for enrichment and or continued interest by encouraging children to design and complete independent learning activities					
III. Classroom Organization					
25. I provide a print rich environment					
26. I provide space where children may display their own work					
27. I provide private as well as group spaces to encourage children to create and experience cooperative as well as independent activities as needed					
28. I provide activity areas which have well defined boundaries that are observable					
29. I make major adaptations in the physical environment when necessary to prevent overcrowding or to acknowledge concerns based on the children's needs					

	Less Often	To The Same Degree	More Often	Stopped Using	Started Using
30. I ensure that children have easy access to teachers and peers as well as learning materials					
31. I provide an orderly, clear arrangement of equipment, materials and supplies which promotes exploration and creativity and which are easily accessible to all children					
32. I promote independence by encouraging children to select, clean up and put away materials needed for chosen activities					
33. I offer materials that address a wide range of developmental stages, capabilities and learning styles					
34. I offer materials that are open-ended so children can use materials in a variety of ways					
35. I use a wide variety of learning tools including teacher-prepared, found objects, materials supplied and created by the children, as well as commercial items					
36. I provide a place for each child to store personal belongings encouraging ownership and responsibility					
IV. Rules and Routines					
37. I involve the children in setting classroom rules and expectations					
38. I organize the daily schedule to allow time for children to plan, implement, describe and assess their own activities					
39. I meet with children daily (individually and / or in small and large groups) to discuss their individual plans and completed activities					

	Less Often	To The Same Degree	More Often	Stopped Using	Started Using
V. Assessment					
40. Progress is related in terms of the continuous growth and development of the whole child in non-comparative ways					
41. A written record is kept in a positive tone of a child's progress based on milestones particular to all aspects of a child's development					
42. In addition to such formats as formal report cards, reporting involves:					
43. - Observation					
44. - Daily journal entries					
45. - Conferencing					
46. - Anecdotal records					
47. - Checklists					
48. - Work samples					
49. - Portfolios					
50. - Video recordings					
51. - Audio recordings					
52. I take time to observe the development of the whole child on a daily basis (I realize I may not get to each child every day)					
53. I use these observations to identify individual strengths as well as needs					
54. I allow children to make choices and be in charge of their learning					
55. I use the results of authentic assessment to set individual, realistic goals so that each child is supported and challenged					

	Less Often	To The Same Degree	More Often	Stopped Using	Started Using
56. I use the insights resulting from authentic assessment to make needed changes in the curriculum and / or environment					
57. I report progress to parents by sharing and reviewing his or her child's recorded observations and conferences, portfolio, anecdotal report card, checklist, video and audio tapes, etc.					
58. Complete assessment of student progress represents a joint venture between the teacher, student and parents					
VI. Parental Communication					
59. I encourage informal communication with parents through notes, phone calls, classroom visits, etc.					

Is there any particular activity that has proven to be particularly successful as part of your daily routine or otherwise? If so, please describe it briefly.

Please explain if you are involved in a multi-age support group? (e.g. Do you meet regularly with other multi-age teachers?)

