ON BECOMING A COMPETENT
MULTI-AGE PRACTITIONER

DIANE M. SMITH CURTIS

ON BECOMING A COMPETENT

MULTI-AGE PRACTITIONER

By

Diane M. Smith Curtis, B.A. (Ed.)

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

Faculty of Education

Memorial University of Newfoundland

September 1999

St. John's   Newfoundland

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine one person's professional growth from traditional, single-grade teaching to competent multi-age teaching with a view to determining some of the conditions that enabled the transition to take place. The study consists of a personal narrative in which the researcher reflects on a twenty-year career focusing on the changes in beliefs and practices over that span of time. The analysis of this narrative consists of an identification of recurring themes and patterns which appear to be indicators of the conditions necessary for professional growth and change, and a discussion of the implications of these themes and patterns for professional growth. The analysis of the narrative can provide a direction for other teachers who wish to examine their own beliefs and practices with a view to implementing multi-age continuous progress principles and practices.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my husband, Lloyd, for his patience and perseverance during my part-time graduate studies: my son, Marc, and my daughter, Melanie, for everything they have taught me; my parents for being there all the way and wondering when I would be finished; my friend Vivien Wass for her encouragement and hospitality; my colleagues at school for allowing me to bounce ideas and research off them, and especially Janice House for always asking questions and helping me keep things practical: my editor, Betty King for her immeasurable help and direction; Denise MacDonald and Renee Sherstobetoff for leading the way in our school district and for sharing their expertise with me; my supervisor, Dr. Dennis Mulcahy for his historical perspective and interest in the topic; and all of my students, past, present and future, who make me want to find better ways of doing things.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

<u>Background to the Present Movement Toward Multi-Age Continuous Progress Education</u>

Multi-age classes provide many opportunities for learning that is relevant, connected, fun, and purposeful (Politano & Davies 1994, p.5). In order to understand this and other reasons for the resurgence in popularity of this approach to teaching and learning, it is helpful to review how this approach has developed over the years beginning in the seventeenth century with the teachings of Comenius.

Patrick Shannon (1990, p.22) writes of Comenius arguing for a developmental view of education and maintaining that children would need less discipline if the curriculum made sense to them. In <u>The Struggle to Continue</u>, Shannon tells us that Comenius suggested multi-age groupings so that one pupil serves as an example and a stimulus for another.

One of the older traditions of education is that of the one-room school (Grant and Johnson, 1995, p.22). These multi-age classes existed long before a system of grades was introduced with children of all ages attending school together, learning from each other and the teacher. Kasten and Clarke (1993, p.4) cite the scant populations in rural America as the reason for the one or two-room schoolhouse. This approach was the only sensible alternative to sending children away from their homes to receive a viable education.

The one-room schoolhouse offered certain attributes that were very sound educationally (Kasten and Clarke, 1993, p.5).

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.

Older more experienced students could assist younger or less experienced ones. Pupils were often needed to help each other and play teacher to other classmates, as there was only one adult with up to eight levels of children to teach. Older students served as role models for younger students, challenging them intellectually and socially. And there was no apparent ceiling on the content taught, discussed, or overheard within the room, which benefitted older students by design and younger students more incidentally. Almost universally, adults who were products of one-room schools have fond, positive memories of their early schooling.

Grant and Johnson (1995, p.21) explain that by the 1830's, large numbers of European immigrants were moving into America. The small one-room schools were not ready for these immigrant children because many people felt it was unnecessary to educate them. They believed that most of the children would become farmers having no need to learn how to read and write. However, Horace Mann, who was secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, was one of those who strongly disagreed. He believed that all children must be educated because of the ideal that democracy depended on educated citizens. His problem then was how to organize schools into a system that could handle so many children.

In 1843, Horace Mann visited Prussia and was impressed by the Prussian system of organizing children into grades according to their chronological age (Grant and Johnson, 1995, p.22). Each grade was assigned a curriculum that a child must accomplish before moving to the next. Mann saw this as an efficient way to ensure education for all, and because teachers of the day had no special training, it would make it

easier to supervise and get the job done. A system of grades was introduced in 1848 at Quincy Grammar School in Boston (Grant and Johnson, 1995, p. 22). Within the next 15 to 20 years, it spread to other cities. One-room schools continued in rural areas, but a graded structure became the norm.

Gaustad (1992, p. 95) refers to the revolutionary idea of mass public education in the mid 1800's which created the need for an efficient, economical system capable of handling large numbers of students. Graded education, the practice of classifying and dividing students by age, spread rapidly throughout the United States and has remained the standard until the present (Goodlad and Anderson 1987).

Konner (1975 as cited in Chase & Doan 1994, p. 147) explains this phenomenon of grouping children by a narrow age range as in all probability being the result of the widespread concentration of large numbers of people into cities through the process of industrialization. Katz (1993) saw the development of what some have referred to as a "factory" model of education, whereby children are grouped in ways that make the delivery of information cost and time-efficient. This model used an assembly line to subject homogeneous materials to identical treatments in order to yield uniform products (Katz, Evangelou, and Hartman 1990, p. vii).

Around the turn of the century, when children in the industrialized nations began going to school en masse, a more or less uniform age of school entry was established, and progress through the grades on the basis of age became a regular practice (Pratt 1986, p.7). Angus, Mirel and Vinovskis (1988, p.232) point out that age-grading was part of

"efficiency-oriented practices [such] as child accounting, intelligence testing, ability grouping and tracking."

At the same time, rural schools played an important role in extending educational opportunities, stabilizing settlement patterns, and nurturing national unity say Haughey and Murphy (1983, p.12). They further outline that these institutions of learning produced the manpower which in turn took full advantage of new developments in agriculture, industry and commerce. Furthermore, many of the nation's political, industrial, and business leaders acquired their basic education and an awareness of what it meant to be Canadian in a "little red school house." Meanwhile, Miller (1991 as cited in Grant and Johnson 1995, p. 21) states that in 1918, there were 196,037 one-room schools, representing 70.8 percent of all public schools in the United States.

After World War II, British educators looked at the strengths attributed to one-room schools and planned and implemented a family grouping model to help heal the emotional scars of children who were sent away from their families during the war (Kasten and Clarke 1993, p.5). 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, pp.30-39).

During 1959, in response to the school reform movement of the late 1950's which was sparked by the launching of Sputnik, the first edition of The Nongraded Elementary

School was published. Goodlad and Anderson (1987, p.xxx) disagreed with "tightening up and toughening up a school system that presumably had gone soft" that was being suggested in the graded school. They were more interested in the work of educators and researchers who concentrated on individual differences among learners (p.xxxi), cognition, and efforts to revitalize and restructure the school subjects (p.xxxii).

One such researcher, who caught their interest while helping to develop a conceptual model of nongrading, was Barbara Nelson Pavan. Her thirty-six statements of principles were divided into six categories: (1) goals of schooling; (2) administrative-organizational framework; (3) materials; (4) curriculum; (5) evaluation and reporting; and (6) methods (Goodlad and Anderson 1987, p.xv).

Educators and parents looking to implement a nongraded program can draw on twenty-five years of research supporting the success of such school organization. After reviewing sixty-four research studies, Anderson and Pavan (1993) found evidence which clearly supported the use of non-graded continuous progress programs. The research indicated that:

1. Research studies comparing nongraded and graded schools provide consistent pattern favoring nongradedness.
2. The nongraded groups performed better (58 percent) or as well as (33 percent) the graded groups on measures of academic achievement.
3. On mental health and school attitudes, 52 percent of the studies indicated nongraded schools as better for students, 43 percent similar. Only 5 percent showed nongraded as worse than graded schools.
4. The benefits of students of nongradedness increase as students have longer nongraded experiences.
5. Blacks, boys, low socioeconomic level students, and underachievers benefit from a nongraded program.

Pavan and Robert H. Anderson both concluded that " in terms of their underlying philosophies, there are no differences between nongraded and open education (Goodlad and Anderson 1987, p.xviii), the latter to be discussed as the next topic.

Their concept of nongrading (Goodlad and Anderson 1987, p.80) included being rid of the graded lock-step structure and using a longitudinal organization of a "continuous, unbroken learning process in which what is learned at one point builds on what has gone before and prepares for what is to come." Instead of grade-level designation at the beginning of school, students would use the term "primary" as their level or the name of the teacher to whose class they were assigned.

Following the publication of A Nation At Risk in 1983, Goodlad and Anderson reprinted their book with a new introduction because of growing evidence that many students were not being served well. They noticed one in four were opting out of high school a year or two before completion; the growing suicide rate of able students in affluent communities and thought that "these occurrences are to a considerable degree correlated with tougher requirements not only for graduating high school but also for passing courses and grades" (Goodlad and Anderson 1987, p.xxxi). Another disturbing matter to them was "the degree to which the onus has been placed on students rather than on the enterprise called school, especially the lock-step curriculum and graded structure that continue to defy most efforts to ameliorate them" (Goodlad and Anderson 1987, p.xxxi).

In 1957 Goodlad and Anderson presented the idea that "nongrading, in both philosophy and structural implications, provides a major means of meeting individual differences in a common curriculum." In their discussion of any changes that they would make to their original work, the inclusion of new material on multi-age grouping was discussed. In order to have their 1950's work fit a later time period, "admission practices at the time of entry to school, of grouping in general, and especially of multiaging would need beefing up to fit the school scene in 1987" (Goodlad and Anderson 1987, p.xli).

Their book which has spanned four decades, has been revised and re-issued and is still an important part of the history of education, including the multi-age approach, "for those educators who would use present-day insights into individual differences, curriculum, and theories of personality, and who would commit themselves to a comprehensive revision of education" (Goodlad and Anderson 1987, p. 226).

The infatuation with the British primary school model of education led to the start of open classrooms. Rathbone (1993, p.xi) saw teachers open up their classrooms to let children have more control over what they wanted to learn and how they wanted to learn it. Setting up family groups, mixed-age classrooms, opening up physical structures of schools, teaching traditional subjects embedded with thematic, interdisciplinary study, filling their classrooms with interesting things, and teaming with peers to model collaborative learning, were all part of the approach.

The Open Classroom concept worked for some, but many teachers resisted the change. Rathbone (1993, p.xi) notes teachers being forced by well-meaning

administrators to change their conventional teaching styles in short periods of time. They resisted the top-down pressure to change and struggled internally as well with the American translation of British practice known as "open education." Cushman (1990, p.82) states the practical reasons why earlier trends towards mixed-age groupings failed:

> Unlike Great Britain's, most American teacher training programs did not teach developmental theories or provide model classrooms to practice them in. By 1975, when a recession began to spark teacher cutbacks in districts across the nation, the newer teachers were the first to go, and many innovative programs died with their departure. The lack of bureaucratic support also made new ways hard for the teacher. Everything from required testing to mandatory grade-level textbooks was organized to counter mixed-age principles.

In the United States, the federal government in 1987 used its regional educational laboratories for one-quarter of its time to direct efforts at rural schools and to develop educational materials for small schools in rural areas (Lewis 1992 as cited in Mulcahy 1993, p. 4).

"We are entering a new cycle with a more humanistic style. Pockets remained here and there, and now the movement is a-borning again," is how Esther Rosenthal, a director of a New York school described the situation to Cushman (1990, p.82). The whole language approach to reading caused teachers to turn to each other for new classroom structures in which the new pedagogies could be carried out (Cushman 1990, p.82). This led to teaming and sharing students and allowed the flexibility to group children at different ability levels together, encouraging them to work with and learn from each other thus personalizing the programs to meet individual needs.

In Canada, a research and development center for small schools and rural education has been established in Manitoba and the University of Victoria offers undergraduate programs designed to prepare teachers for rural contexts (Mulcahy 1993, p.4). A month long internship in a local rural school is included as part of the program, and students have the opportunity to plan for and teach in multi-grade classrooms (Miller 1988 as cited in Mulcahy 1993, p.4). The recent launch of the Telelearning and Rural School Teaching diploma program at Memorial University of Newfoundland (Summer 1999) addresses some of the problems experienced by teachers in rural areas with the inclusion of courses in internet and intranet teaching. It also contains a field service component which allows students to spend several weeks in rural schools as part of the program and offers courses in multi-grade and multi-age teaching.

Mixed-age grouping has its roots in the one-room schoolhouse (Webb 1992 as cited in Theilheimer 1993, p. 89). Although it flourished again during the heyday of open classrooms (Day & Hunt 1975, p.36), the popularization of stage theory-the idea that children's development follows predictable stages-has worked against mixed-age grouping's widespread implementation (Freedman 1982). The assumption has been that children should be grouped according to their stage and that their age roughly predicts their stage.

Developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp 1987, pp.62-66) offers a way of thinking about stage theory that opens the door to mixed-age grouping. Acknowledging the importance of development and the contributions of stage theorists,

developmentally appropriate practice matches current curriculum to each child's stage of development; but developmentally appropriate practice has a second dimension: meeting the individual needs of the child (Theilheimer 1993, p. 89).

In 1987 the National Association for the Education of Young Children published an expanded edition of <u>Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age Eight</u>. Grant and Johnson (1995, p.19) outline what might be stated as nine principles of developmentally appropriate practices:

- a teacher must be aware of all aspects of a child's development.
- curriculum needs to be integrated.
- physical activity is vital for children's cognitive growth.
- a relevant and engaging curriculum that is meaningful for children and that provides a great variety of materials as well as many opportunities for interaction both among children and between children and adults.
- to develop and use opportunities for conversation among children as well as between children and teachers.
- the importance of using cooperative small group projects both to support learning and to provide an opportunity for social/emotional development.
- being able to read, write, and calculate numerically is valued by our culture and is therefore important to a child's sense of competency.
- recognizes that at about 6 years old, children begin to internalize moral rules of behavior. Adults need to provide support and encouragement to this developing self-control.
- acknowledges that it is not just knowledge and skills young children are learning in the early years but also attitudes and dispositions.

Further developments in the Progressive Education movement (Katz, Evangelou and Hartman 1990, p.10) have encouraged the implementation of more multi-age classrooms. The work of Vygotsky (1978 as cited in Wertsch 1985, p. 24) presents

theoretical support for the success of these classrooms. He identified the area of potential learning that soon becomes actual learning as the zone of proximal development which he explains as:

> the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance with more capable peers.
>
> We propose that an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. From this point of view, learning is not development, however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning.

Vygotsky views learning as caused by the internalization of speech and language exercised and extended in the social group (Rathbone 1993, p.156). Because learning "presupposes a specific social event," Vygotsky (1978 as cited in Rathbone 1993, p.157) underscores the importance of speech in a young child's learning. He sees speech as equally as important an activity (Rathbone 1993, p.157). The practice of encouraging conversation and interaction among students, which many teachers in multi-age classrooms have found to be strong elements, are entirely compatible with Vygotsky's thought.

Further to Vygotsky's work, Slavin (1987, p.1162) points out that the discrepancy between what an individual can do with and without assistance can be the basis for cooperative efforts that can result in cognitive gains. In his view, "collaborative activity

among children promotes growth because children of similar ages are likely to be operating within one another's proximal zones of development, modelling in the collaborating group behaviour more advanced than those they could perform as individuals."

Brown and Palincsar (1986, p.31) speak of cognitive conflict in the interactions between those who hold conflicting understandings which lead the less informed member to internalize new understandings in the form of "fundamental cognitive restructuring." Collaboration between "novices" and "experts" are also referred to in the research by Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, and Campione (1983, pp.515-529) and Brown and Reeve (1985 as cited in Katz, Evangelou & Hart 1990, p. 26) as they support Vygotsky's contention that learning experiences most likely enhance development when children's activities are socially directed by "experts". The more capable experts prompt increasingly advanced solutions, direct leading questions leading novices to defend or alter their theories. The notion that supportive social contexts create new levels of competence, then defends the use of mixed-age grouping, in which ranges of competence offer varying levels of cognitive input (Katz, Evangelou, and Hartman 1990, p. 26).

Research on peer tutoring (Cohen 1986, p.175; Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik 1982, pp.237-248; and Lippitt 1976, pp.157-168); cooperative learning (Russell & Ford 1983, pp. 436-441; Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, & Roy, 1984; Slavin 1987, p. 1167); cross-age interaction on social behavior, Roopnarine (1987, pp. 143-162) all indicate advantages and possibilities for their use in mixed-age classes.

Two successful examples of mixed-age settings may be found in the Malcolm Price Laboratory School at the University of Northern Iowa and the Fajans School in Sweden. In Iowa, the program operates on the assumption that " the greater the difference among children in a classroom, the richer the learning environment for the child" (Doud & Finklestein 1985, p.9). Papadopoulas (1988, p.4) describes the Swedish school's objectives to create close contact between preschool and primary units, to create a homelike atmosphere, and to maintain the same peer groups from nursery to the primary grades in a building designed to "facilitate flexibility and free movement of pupils in the classrooms."

Lougee & Graziano, undated; Graziano et al., 1976; Hartup, 1983, suggest that mixed group interaction can have unique adaptive, facilitating, and enriching effects on children's development.

Gardner's identification of multiple intelligences (1983) has led many teachers to plan activities which not only enhance intelligences, but allows students to awaken dormant or weaker intelligences and help students to grow and learn in different ways (Chapman and Shrenko1993).

As for Newfoundland and Labrador, multi-grade classrooms and small schools have always been a part of the educational system in rural areas (Mulcahy 1993, p.15). At the time of Confederation with Canada in 1949, sixty-eight (68%) of all schools in the province were one room schools (McCann, 1992 as cited in Mulcahy 1993, p. 15). Mulcahy (1993, p.15) goes on to explain that the fifties, sixties, and seventies witnessed a

period of small school closures partly due to an overall policy of resettlement and a concerted effort on the part of school districts to improve the educational provision in rural areas by consolidating a considerable number of small schools into larger schools.

However, even with the large number of one-room and rural schools, the special needs of small schools and rural areas have been either ignored or directly discriminated against (Singh and Baksh 1978; Riggs 1987; and Doody 1991 as cited in Mulcahy 1993, p.2). Riggs (1987 as cited in Mulcahy 1993, p. 2) identified the feelings of "impatience, helplessness, anxiety and frustration" caused by the general disregard for the plight of educators in rural areas of the province.

In his Small Schools Study Project (1987), Riggs (as cited in Mulcahy 1993, p. 2) made a strong plea for renewed commitment to rural education in Newfoundland and Labrador. However, the recommendations were never given much more than 'lip-service" (Mulcahy 1993, p.3).

The Royal Commission Report (1992) Our Children, Our Future, states that in 1989-90 there were "525 schools located in 307 communities; in 257 of these communities (84 percent) there [was] just one school system- a significant change from 1965, when there were 1,266 schools in more than 800 communities" (p.62). Many recommendations were made to improve the quality of schooling in rural areas. To date few have been initiated.

The Small Schools Curriculum Project studied the challenges faced by educators in providing quality educational experiences for the children who attend small schools in

the rural areas of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (Mulcahy 1993, p.5). Its aim was to develop a data base of knowledge and understanding about rural education and small schools.

Although the multi-grade phenomenon has been the norm (Mulcahy 1993, p.15) in many rural areas for a long period of time, many negative connotations have been associated with it. One of the most powerful sources of negativism, according to Mulcahy's study (1993, p.62) " has to be the way it was used in the past as a weapon to force communities to accept the closure of their small community schools." He continues by saying "parents were told by school board officials that they had to accept the bussing of their children to another community or face the prospect of having multi-grade classes in their schools"(p.62). The insinuation was that multi-grades were a substandard form of education and that if parents "cared about their children's future they must agree to bus them to a single grade school" (Mulcahy 1993, p.62). He finds it ironic when "today many of these same boards face the task of convincing parents that multi-grades are in fact a viable option."

Mulcahy's study (1993) reveals that the challenges of multi-grade classrooms have often made it a difficult and unwanted teaching assignment. The nature of the provincial curriculum with its lack of responsiveness to the organizational structure of multi-grade classrooms (p.40); the degree and kind of individual differences among students in multi-age classes (p.44); the maturation levels in multi-grade classes (p.47); the social and transitional dynamics (p.48); the complexity of planning, preparing and

instructing (p.52); and the negative attitudes and perceptions associated with multi-grade teaching on the part of parents and educators (p.57) are some of the challenges encountered.

Rural educators in general, and multi-age teachers in particular, find the lack of recognition, acknowledgment and support they have received from the various educational authorities as one of the greatest sources of frustration and sometimes anger (Mulcahy 1993, p.63). The lack of leadership and direction in implementing the provincially mandated curriculum (p.63); lack of preservice education from the Faculty of Education at Memorial University (p.67); small degree of guidance, direction and support from professional staff of school boards (p.69); and not much support from the Newfoundland and Labrador Teacher's Association (p.70) are some of the reasons for the frustration and anger.

The chronology outlined above demonstrates the longevity of the multi-age movement in an assortment of phases. It details how a multi-age approach began in the time of Comenius, had its roots in the one-room school; was curtailed with the introduction of a graded system of schooling with the exception of some rural areas; had its attributes incorporated into the British Primary School; was encouraged in the nongraded approach, and was implemented in name only at the time of the Open Classroom in the 1960's and 1970's. However, it persevered when some teachers continued to teach in the reformed style and called their settings multi-age classrooms. Today, several states in the United States have mandated multi-age or nongraded

primaries while others are encouraged to use this approach by the use of innovative grants and workshops. Other countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Great Britain and Sweden are using this approach in varying degrees. Numerous research studies have shown many advantages to the multi-age approach to education which has led to its implementation and successful practice in increasing numbers.

Rathbone (1993, p. xiii) considers the teaching profession as being in the midst of a paradigm shift from schools as centers of teaching to schools as centers of learning. He believes multi-age practice will occur in schools whose focus is on learning. The position of teachers presently, in his estimation, is transitional. Grant and Johnson (1995, p.62) consider the chances for the implementation of multi-age practice as being favorable, because teachers are becoming better trained, are aware of developmentally appropriate practice and have a desire to teach the way children learn best. After all, as Rathbone (1993, p.159) once wrote in his journal, "The world is multiage, why not schools?"

Background to this Study

As novice teachers, we enter the classroom with certain preconceived notions about the nature of teaching and learning. Usually our ideas come from our own experiences as learners, our university background, other areas of training, as well as from the expectations communicated by colleagues and school or district administrators. My initiation into teaching was particularly difficult for several reasons. First, I had only two years of university training. This was common practice during the 1970's in outport

Newfoundland because teaching positions were plentiful. The more qualified teachers preferred to teach in urban centers which left the less desirable rural areas open to less qualified teachers. Second, I was assigned to teach high school courses even though any training methods that I did have were at the elementary level. Third, I was assigned to teach in a multi-grade classroom, a structure with which I was completely unfamiliar. I had gone to school in an urban area and had experience only with single-grade classrooms.

Fourth, the administration of the school changed hands early in the year and I was left with practically no guidance other than being told to "do your best."

All teachers have their own ways of knowing their classrooms. This knowledge accumulates over a lifetime of experiences from childhood to early schooling to university training and, finally, to teaching experiences. This personal practical knowledge is in the person's past experience, in the present mind and body, and in the plans for the future (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 25). It is my belief that, through writing a personal narrative of those life experiences that have contributed to my development as a professional teacher, I will come to better understand the meaning of my school situations. Through reflection on, and analysis of the narrative, I should better understand the influences on my beliefs and practices as well as the means by which I can change those practices in order to provide an environment conducive to learning and to meeting the needs of my students.

This personal narrative will highlight certain events which have helped change my

philosophy of education. What began as a belief in the teacher as locus of power and

control has evolved into a belief in a child-centered approach to teaching in a multi-age

class. My recent experiences with multi-age teaching have helped me realize that this is

the kind of organization I would like to see in the classroom, and that it best reflects my

beliefs about the nature of learning. As Bev Maeda (1994, p. 7) summarizes:

> Optimal learning occurs in nurturing environments that foster self-esteem, risk-taking, and decision-making.
> Instruction and activities accommodate individual differences in learning rates and styles.
> Learning is holistic and includes the social, emotional, and intellectual development of the child.
> Students construct their own knowledge. It cannot be transmitted to them.
> Children learn best when they interact with people and the environment.

Over the span of a twenty year teaching career, many events occurred both in the

classroom and in my personal life, that have led me to believe in the value of a multi-age

approach. The novice in me was forced to rely on how I had been taught to get through

my first teaching assignment. Although my grades eight and nine combination class as

well as the grades ten and eleven combination class were very different from my own

schooling experience. I knew no other way of handling the workload. Consequently, I

set myself up as the voice of authority and expected blind obedience from students. Even

then I recognized that this was a recipe for failure.

Parenting my own children influenced my philosophy of education tremendously.

It enabled me to see first hand how children grow and develop at different rates. My

children forced me to think about the way I would like to have them taught, the type of

classroom I would like them to be in, and the type of teacher I would like to have working with them. They made me realize there had to be an alternate approach to grouping. I knew I had to look for it.

Upgrading my credentials provided the opportunity to learn new things. Although there was no talk of multi-age teaching, and I still believed in the graded structure, I felt better informed and willing to talk with other educators to see how teaching was handled elsewhere. Working with various principals influenced the way I taught as well. Even though our philosophies may not have complemented each other, there were occasions when I was given professional support.

Having young teachers come to the school was beneficial. They were usually so energetic and offered alternatives to the way we approached instruction. They were willing to share their ideas, and take on numerous responsibilities which added to the program we could offer. The attitudes towards Special Needs students improved greatly because of their contributions.

Becoming the principal of the school opened up a whole new dimension to me. Not only did I have my own teaching practice to think about, but also I had the responsibility of encouraging other teachers to stay current. Setting up a community of learners in the school and producing a safe and supportive environment were top priorities.

My entry into graduate studies, my professional development and in-service opportunities, and our school's attempts at "School Improvement" helped with my

journey towards competency in multi-age teaching. The School Administrators' Council Conference in Gander in 1995 with Jim Grant, at that time Executive Director of the Society For Developmental Education, as the guest speaker, was perhaps the most influential event in my quest for an alternate approach to teaching. His whole presentation made so much sense and was the catalyst to my search for more information.

Meeting other teachers who used a multi-age approach to teaching and being able to visit their classrooms solidified my belief in the approach. Having other teachers in the local area who were willing to listen to my thoughts and having them try some of the methodology I had read about, boosted my resolve to implement some of these methods slowly and carefully.

In 1996, a colleague and I team taught in the grades four-five-six class which was a great learning experience. There were many things that I would change, but professional growth depends on classroom-based research and reflection.

In 1997, our school was re-opened leaving just two of us on staff to teach thirty students in kindergarten to grade four. This dilemma presented the greatest challenge and forced us to assess our situation and re-think our approaches in order to devise the best means of meeting students' needs. That was the year I came to realize that becoming a multi-age practitioner is very demanding and requires persistence, patience, and a strong desire to learn with students.

My year in 1998 with a single-grade class of eight year olds made me realize that I was only practicing for the time I would have another multi-age class. I could envision

our whole primary school as being multi-age with teachers working and planning together in a nongraded setting using developmentally appropriate practice as our guide.

The journey I have embarked upon to become a competent multi-age practitioner will not end with the writing of this narrative. The narrative is the vehicle for reflecting on my beliefs and relating them to my practices. I am just beginning to feel comfortable with the concept of multi-age teaching and am convinced that it suits my style of teaching and meets the needs of most of the students I have encountered. What lies ahead is the task of honing my craft, improving my competency, and continuing to learn.

This study is a personal narrative of my journey from the beginning of my career to the present. It delineates my early beliefs in a traditional, single-grade approach to education through my changing beliefs as I adapted to a multi-grade class and, finally, to my present beliefs in multi-age continuous progress education.

The study continues with an analysis of the narrative through identification and discussion of recurrent themes and patterns that appear throughout the narrative. The analysis attempts to identify the conditions necessary for changing to a belief in the principles and practices associated with multi-age continuous progress classrooms.

The analysis, therefore, may prove helpful to teachers who are interested in practices that focus on the developmental needs of the child; the role of the teacher as facilitator and learner; the collaborative nature of learning; the nature of a student-centered, integrated, authentic curriculum.

<u>Limitations of the Study</u>

Limitations do exist in this personal narrative qualitative inquiry. First, I recognize the difficulty of carrying out an analysis of a personal narrative. It is far more difficult to be objective than when examining a narrative written by someone else. I have tried, however, to stand back from the narrative and to let the themes and patterns emerge naturally from my re-reading of the narrative. Second, I recognize that, while I have thoroughly examined the research literature on multi-age continuous progress classrooms and used this research to examine changes in my practices, it would have been more illuminating had I been able to track students in my own class in order to assess the effects of the multi-age classroom on their social, emotional, and academic achievement. Given that I was unable to go back in time to assess the students I have taught, I believe the approach I have taken in this study to be the best one possible in the circumstances.

<u>Definition of Terms</u>

For purposes of this study, the terms below are defined as follows:

Assessment: is a judgement of the quality of student outcomes measured against the learning objectives.

Anecdotal Record: a written record kept in a positive tone of a child's progress based on milestones particular to that child's social, emotional, physical, aesthetic, and cognitive development. Recording happens throughout the day while actual activities are occurring. Recordings are made when appropriate and are not forced, in other words you may go a few days without reporting on a particular child if there is nothing that bears

recording.

This method is informal and encourages the use of notes or a checklist with space for comments. Continuous notes are recorded about what a child can do and his or her achievements, as opposed to what he or she cannot do. Instead of writing "John has been a continuous discipline problem. Today he participated in a group for 10 minutes, but then started distracting the other students and had to be removed," the anecdotal record may read something like "John contributed attentively in group time for 10 minutes."

Authentic Assessment: an assessment of what the teacher actually wants students to be able to do or understand. Assessment occurs in the context of normal classroom involvement and reflects the actual learning experience. Portfolios, journals, observations, taped readings, videotapes, and conferences are examples. The tasks are frequently open-ended and judgement is required to evaluate the level of performance.

Child-focused Classroom: a classroom where instruction is focused on the needs of individual children, where children have choices and must take a part of the responsibility for their own learning.

Collaboration: planning, involving, and supporting students by two or more concerned groups-teachers, aides, itinerant and resource teachers, parents, and community representatives.

Continuous Progress: a student's unique progression through the primary program at his or her own rate without the comparison of others. Retention, promotion and assigned letter grades are not compatible with this progression. The curriculum and

expectations for student performance in a continuous progress program are not linked to the child's age or number of years in school.

Cooperative Learning: an extensively researched instructional method in which students are heterogeneously grouped to produce academic and social gains. Students are individually accountable for their learning, yet also experience a sense of interdependency for the success of their group.

Critical Attributes: descriptors that define necessary components of the primary program. They are developmentally appropriate educational practices, multi-age/multi-ability classrooms, continuous progress, authentic assessment, qualitative reporting methods, professional teamwork, and positive parent involvement.

Developmental Appropriateness: This concept has two dimensions:

Age appropriateness: human development research indicates universal, predictable milestones of growth and change that occur in children during the first nine years of life. These predictable changes occur in all domains of development-physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and aesthetic. Knowledge of the typical development of children within the age span served by an educational program provides the framework for teachers to use when preparing the learning environment and planning appropriate experiences.

Individual appropriateness: each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, learning style, and family background. The curriculum and adults' interactions with children should be responsive to individual differences. Learning in young children is the result of interaction between

the child's thoughts and experiences with materials, ideas, and people. When these experiences match the child's developmental abilities, and also challenge the child's interest and understanding, learning will take place.

<u>Developmentally Appropriate Educational Practices</u>: these educational practices and curriculum components that coincide with and foster developmental appropriateness. These would include an integrated curriculum, active child involvement and interaction, use of manipulative and multisensory activities, a balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities, varied instructional strategies, and flexible groupings and regroupings.

<u>Developmentally Appropriate Environments</u>: settings that coincide with and foster children's developmental growth-tables or grouped desks instead of rows of separated desks, easily accessible shelves with varied materials for a wide range of uses, and a home-like setting.

<u>Eavesdropping</u>: this event occurs when children with developmental differences are grouped together. One child with a particular skill may be working on a project as another child watches and listens. When the child is ready to perform the same sort of skill, whether it is in the same year or the next, the child understands what is expected after having seen it modeled in a very informal way.

<u>Evaluation</u>: evaluation is a deliberate appraisal of the effectiveness and quality of the teaching and learning that have taken place. It a process used continually in planning, monitoring, reflecting and post-programming.

<u>Family Grouping</u>: group of students who stay with the same classmates and teacher(s) for more than one year. For example, in a multi-age grouping of six, seven and

eight-year-olds, approximately a third of the class would stay the same, a third would move to fourth grade, and a third would be new to the class. A child could be in this class for three years.

Flexible Grouping: a combination of homogeneous and heterogenous grouping on an ad hoc basis.

Flexible Scheduling: scheduling that changes according to the needs of the students and time needed for thematic instruction, rather than following isolated periods of time for separate subjects.

Flip-flop the Curriculum: this way of approaching curriculum delivery occurs when two or more grades are combined in one multi-grade classroom. In order to cover the material in a required textbook, the text from one grade can be used by the entire class for one year, with the textbook from the next grade level being used the following year.

Heterogeneous Grouping: the grouping of children based on their differences-age, sex, race or achievement. A heterogeneous group would be composed of girls and boys of mixed ages and abilities.

Homogeneous Grouping: the grouping of children based on their similarities, such as age, ability or test scores. For example, John may be in Mrs. Smith's room because he is seven years old, and this is his second year of school. He is in the red reading group because he is a good reader, but receives special tutoring in math because his standardized test score was lower than a particular number. John was homogeneously grouped each time. This practice is not consistent with the nongraded primary program.

<u>Integrated Curriculum</u>: cutting across subject matter lines to bring together various curricular content areas in a meaningful and true-to-life association. Theme study is a technique for integrating curricula, but not all integrated curricula revolve around a theme. Whole language and writing across the curriculum are examples of integrated approaches that may or may not involve a thematic approach.

<u>Integration/Correlation</u>: teaching strategies where concepts and skills from several content areas are taught simultaneously with a particular theme, topic or project. When the natural connections among the various content areas are recognized and teaching is structured to acknowledge and reinforce them, integration or correlation occurs. In integration, there are no content boundaries. When subject areas remain discrete, but a common theme serves as the organizer for developing instruction in each, the correlation is occurring.

<u>Interest Grouping</u>: grouping according to the topics of interest to students.

<u>Learning Centers</u>: areas of the classroom containing a variety of small-group and individualized materials, with self-directed activities for regular instructional needs or enrichment.

<u>Lifelong Learners</u>: students who will be able to think for themselves, make wise decisions, be responsible and dependable, self-directed, and able to do research and manage their time effectively.

<u>Literature-Based Instruction</u>: a strategy for teaching reading using literature as the foundation. The language arts components (spelling and grammar) and content areas are

taught around a particular book or piece of literature. From this base, skill development and related activities evolve. Multiple copies of books that represent a wide range of literary categories-fiction, nonfiction, and poetry are essential.

Manipulatives : concrete or hands-on instructional materials and games used in the classroom to introduce and reinforce skills (especially in math). The use of manipulatives is developmentally appropriate for young children who need to learn by using real objects. Examples include geometric puzzles, building blocks, and measuring cups.

Multi-Age Class: a class which has children of varying ages remaining with the same teacher or team of teachers for more than one year thus establishing a community of learners using an integrated curriculum with developmentally appropriate practice.

Multi-Grade Class (Combined Class): a classroom containing students from several different grades who are combined because of small numbers or other economic reasons. They are taught using separate grade level texts for individual subjects at designated times specific to the timetable.

Narrative: is the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future.

Nongraded (Ungraded): term used to describe schools, classes, or curricula, without concern for the grades a child is in school, such as first, second, or third grade (not to be confused with the elimination of letter grades).

Nongraded (Ungraded) Primary School: school with a flexible system for grouping children together regardless of age and number of years in school. Extensive efforts are made to adapt instruction to individual differences.

Overlapping: a term first used by Kounin (1970) to describe the ability of teachers to deal with more than two things at once. Rathbone (1993) adapted the term in his study to mean the simultaneous occurrence of classroom elements.

Performance Assessment: assessment based on a child's actual performance within the context of the classroom, as opposed to assessment from tests or written assignments that could differ from the processes a child used while learning the material.

Personal Practical Knowledge: term used to emphasize the teacher's knowing of a classroom. It is in the person's past experience, in the person's present mind and body, and in the person's future plans and actions. It is a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions for the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation.

Portfolio: folder, scrapbook or binder containing work samples, performance data, observations, writing samples, tests, etc., used as a basis for student evaluation and assessment.

Positive Parent Involvement: the establishment of productive relationships between the school and the home to enhance communication, promote understanding, and provide opportunities for children to interact with people, places and things in their immediate environment and beyond.

Process: the ability of the student to make a connection or to see patterns so that the transfer of information from one situation to another occurs.

Process Skills: to identify, select, analyze, and communicate.

Professional Teamwork: members of the professional staff have regular opportunities to exchange information and ideas and cooperatively plan the instructional program. They may use team or collaborative teaching and peer coaching to meet the needs of the students and provide support and assistance for each other.

Qualitative Reporting Methods: regular home-school communication describing how and what the child is learning, individual accomplishments, interests, abilities, and attitudes. Progress is related in terms of the continuous growth and development of the whole child in noncomparative ways. Reporting encompasses formats such as formal narrative report cards, conferences, portfolios, journals, videotapes, and anecdotal records.

School Improvement Plan: each school team explores the strengths and areas of growth at the school and puts action plans in place to achieve prioritized goals.

Self-Directed Activities: activities that are individualized, where children may choose from alternatives, and work independently without teacher direction.

Self-Directed Students: students who are dependable, responsible, able to think for themselves, and make wise choices and decisions.

Self-Pacing Materials: materials that are individualized and self-correcting so that students work alone at their own rates, correcting themselves as they go and keeping track of their own performances and progress.

Student-Centered Curriculum: curriculum presented by the teacher to fit the needs and choices of individuals, where students are partly responsible for determining the scope and sequence of activities, and for their own learning.

Student-Focused Classroom: a classroom environment where the teacher assumes the role of facilitator of learning; offering choices, materials, and resources, guiding scope and sequence and sharing responsibility for learning with students.

Teacher-Centered Curriculum: curriculum planned by the teacher for all students to cover at the same time with little choice for students, and without regard to the variety of individual levels and interests.

Teacher Facilitator: teacher in the role of learning guide, offering choices, helping students find materials and determining scope and sequence for the student to follow.

Teacher-Focused Classroom: teacher as information provider and learning director.

Team Teaching: two or more teachers who plan, and support each other with common and agreed upon roles and responsibilities. They teach to a combined group of students, which may be grouped and regrouped.

Thematic Approach to Curriculum: an approach to learning that motivates students to investigate interesting ideas from multiple perspectives. The central theme becomes the catalyst for developing concepts, generalizations, skills and attitudes. The rationale is grounded in a philosophy that young children learn most efficiently when they perceive subjects as worthy of their time, attention, and inquiry. These themes may be

broad-based or narrow in scope, may be used in designated classes or the whole school, and may last for a few weeks to several months.

Traditional Classroom: a traditional classroom contains students of approximately the same age in a single grade configuration. It is teacher-directed using a prescribed set of texts for all students regardless of their developmental level. Most work is completed individually and can be competitive. Grades may be considered as incentive to learn. The general arrangement of the class has seats in rows with the teacher using a lecture style from the front of the room.

Whole Language: a dynamic, evolving philosophy with the core being the understanding that listening, speaking, writing, and reading are not isolated for study but permeate the whole curriculum. Language is taught as a "whole," not by fragmented skills. Teachers and children take significant responsibility for learning and are involved actively in all the processes (listening, speaking, writing, and reading) at all times.

Workshopping: the concept of the classroom as a workshop is based on a belief that children learn from practice-from doing. It emphasizes student input, collaboration among teacher and students, and among students themselves, responsibility, independence, self-evaluation, critical thinking, and celebration. Children need opportunities to grow in all areas of language arts.

Student input occurs on a regular basis in a workshop as students self-select the topics and genres for writing, and self select texts to read. The teacher's role is to facilitate this process and to guide children in making appropriate choices. The

classroom workshop structure can apply to numerous curricular areas including reading and writing

.

- ▸ Some words and definitions are taken from <u>The Edmonds Project: A School of Choice for the 21st Century</u>, a State Grant Submitted for the 21st Century, by the staff of Madrona Nongraded School. Co-authored by Janet Caudill Banks.

- ▸ Other words and definitions are taken from <u>The Nongraded Primary: Making Schools Fit Children,</u> (1992), a publication of the American Association of School Administrators; Rodney Davis, Editor.

- ▸ Several words and definitions are found in <u>Teachers as Curriculum Planners: Narratives of Experience</u> written by Connelly and Clandinin (1988).

Several terms used in the review of the literature as well as other sections of this thesis may connotate a method of instruction or resources used in this approach which would be unfamiliar to a reader who is being introduced to multi-age pedagogy. The definitions may clarify the material which will enable the reader to better understand this approach to teaching and learning.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Major changes in school structure have created a promising new climate for an old approach to education (Anderson and Pavan 1993, pp. 9-12). The old approach to which they refer is multi-age teaching. Other terms such as non-graded, ungraded, multi-grade, heterogeneous grouping, vertical grouping, blends, mixed-age grouping, family grouping, and multi-age continuous progress are being used, in many cases, interchangeably (Katz 1988, Miller 1989, p.2).

A review of the literature on multi-age teaching reveals numerous definitions, characteristics, advantages, beliefs, and principles supporting the implementation of this approach in schools. The literature also points to a number of misconceptions about multi-age education held by both parents and educators alike. These misconceptions often lead to misgivings that are unfounded and that tend to be related to personal educational experiences which have not included such organizations or to the mistaken notion that multi-age education is a throw back to the days of the one-room school and multi-graded classes. Still others may have experienced only the traditional graded system and wonder how they would cope with all the different levels of ability and curricular demands of a multi-age class. For many, the phenomenon is unfamiliar (Hart-Hewlins and Villiers, 1997, p.9).

In order to dispel some of the misconceptions and misgivings about multi-age teaching, and to understand its underlying philosophy, it is important to consider what a

multi-age classroom is and is not. Ann Bingham (1995, p.8) reminds us that a multi-age

classroom is "a permanent class grouping of planned diversity." As such, she says that

although some class configurations...

> are called "multiage" they do not fit our definition. She continues to say that a
> multiage classroom is not two grades put together for convenience, perhaps to
> accommodate a population bulge, and probably for only a year or two. Neither is
> it a "combined" class in which separate curricula continue, an unreasonable task
> for teachers and one that undermines the class as a community.

The American Association of School Administrators (1992, p.7) outlines what a

non-graded primary is not:

- An excuse for using the "back-to-basics" movement to narrow the
  curriculum and adopt instructional approaches that are incompatible with
  current knowledge about how young children learn and develop.
- Based on rigid ability groups or age/grade groupings.
- A static, lock-step learning system with little regard for a child's interest or
  motivation to move vertically (advancing upward into a higher grade level)
  and horizontally as he or she is interested in new knowledge.
- An emphasis on learning based solely on the intellectual domain defined
  as discrete, technical, academic skills.
- Work time where children are expected to work silently and alone on
  worksheets or with teacher-directed groups where a lecture or "Round
  Robin" reading in a circle occurs.
- The teacher at the front of the room all day as the "sage on the stage."
- An isolated learning of subjects with worksheets to support teaching and
  little relationship of concepts among subject areas, with the day divided
  into individual time segments for each subject area, and learning not seen
  as a part of a whole.
- A system that considers grades are the motivator for children to do work.

After considering what the multi-age approach to teaching and learning is not, it

should prove helpful to present definitions of the approach. This will be followed by an

investigation of the essential characteristics, principles and beliefs connected with the multi-age classroom. The next section will outline the educational advantages of multi-age education followed by techniques for classroom management, curriculum, and some instructional strategies. A critique of the graded approach to schooling will complete the discussion. This review is intended to help clarify what is involved in a multi-age approach to teaching.

<u>Current Definitions of Multi-Age Education</u>

Most definitions of multi-age teaching include references to grouping children of varying ages and abilities, and to learning at different rates. Wolfson (1967, p.354) sees the multi-age classroom as "one in which children whose ages span 2-3 years are placed together without consideration of their levels of ability or achievement."

Stehney (1970) explains it as an arrangement whereby "children of various ages, abilities, and interests are put together in a learning situation in a school on the basis of philosophy, not from administrative convenience."

Susan Black (1993, p.76) generalizes by saying multi-age grouping means "dropping traditional grade-level designations in favor of teaching older and younger students together in the same room." She adds that it includes placing children in mixed-age groups so they can learn at their own rates.

The Kasten and Clarke (1993, p.3) definition considers "any deliberate grouping of children that includes more than one traditional grade level in a single classroom

community." They continue by saying "it is a random, balanced grouping from the school population, created with the support of the administration and participating teacher or teachers, the consent of parents, and the best educational interests of the children in mind." Politano and Davies (1994, p.3) agree when they mention "children of different ages intentionally grouped for learning."

Bingham (1995, p.8) believes it to be "a permanent class grouping of planned diversity." In the multi-age classroom, she adds, "children's developmental diversity is celebrated, valued as part of a natural community of learners and harnessed in subtle ways to support learning." The emphasis in these definitions is on grouping children of different ages and having the students interacting and learning at their own rate.

Joan Gaustad (1992, p.95) in her article "Making the Transition from Graded to Non-Graded Primary Education", defines non-graded education, a term which she uses interchangeably with multi-age education, as the "practice of teaching children of different ages and ability levels together, without dividing them (or the curriculum) into steps labeled by grade distinctions." It is also seen as "an educational strategy that promotes the development of a fuller range of the child's social skills, which are critical to the child's current and future well being as well as being a key strategy for ensuring a full range of social and cognitive experience" (Chase and Doan 1994, p.160).

Bruce Miller (1994, p.2) reinforces the importance of the child's developmental needs as he defines multi-age to mean:

> two or more grade levels that have been intentionally placed together to improve learning. The child's developmental needs, regardless of grade-level curriculum

or administrative placement, stand out as a key defining characteristic of the multiage concept. Ideally there is a blurring of grade- and age-level distinctions as students blend into a caring community of learners.

From the preceding definitions, common elements of the multi-age model can be identified. Grouping varying age students in a classroom, regardless of their abilities, is an important factor. Emphasizing the child's developmental needs and how best to meet them is another key concept. A third important element is the belief in developmentally appropriate practice and a holistic philosophy which includes not only academic performance but also the child's social, psychological and physical well-being. To summarize, using developmentally appropriate practice in a classroom of students of varying ages and abilities, to produce a community of life-long learners appears to be the intent of a multi-age class.

Multi-age grouping is an educational strategy that has a solid history in American education (Goodlad and Anderson 1987). It is also an educational strategy that continues to gather credibility as theory (Piaget 1977; Vygotsky 1978) and educational research (Brown & Palincsar 1986) accumulate on the learning process and its neurological correlates in the developmental and morphology of the human brain (Huttenlocher 1990; Kandal and Hawkins 1992; Squire 1992). It is a methodology that creates one of the necessary conditions for fostering the social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth of children. Multi-age grouping is a philosophy, in other words, that can help empower schools to do what they were intended to do: educate (McClellan 1991, p.148)

The Essential Characteristics, Principles and Beliefs of a Multi-Age Classroom

Multi-age classrooms exhibit essential characteristics, principles, beliefs and

features of their own. According to Grant and Johnson (1995, p.40)

> A multiage continuous progress program is in practical terms, an ideal. It is a goal
> toward which you travel bit by bit, turning theory into day-by-day success. But it
> involves great changes for everyone involved. It requires time, patience, courage,
> and commitment."

Maeda (1994, p.12) suggests that:

> Teachers making the transition into a multi-age program should choose those
> components they feel they can implement successfully. It is unrealistic for
> teachers beginning such a program to incorporate all the components (in this
> section). The most significant feature is a nurturing, interactive environment that
> allows children to develop at their own pace without fear of failure.

As she discusses her multi-age classroom, Bev Maeda (1994, p.7) describes the

organization of her multi-age class based on the following beliefs about the nature of

learning:

- Optimal learning occurs in nurturing environments that foster self-esteem, risk-taking, and decision-making.
- Instruction and activities accommodate individual differences in learning rates and styles.
- Learning is holistic and includes the social, emotional, and intellectual development of the child.
- Students construct their own knowledge. It cannot be transmitted to them.
- Children learn best when they interact with people and the environment.

Anne Bingham (1995, p. 14-17) cites certain beliefs which guide multi-age

teaching. These include:

- A belief in child-centered learning.
- A belief that active, concrete learning experiences are essential for young children.
- A belief in the whole child.
- A belief in the importance of community.

- A belief that many kinds of learning are essential.
- A belief that human interaction, including conversation, supports rather than detracts from learning.
- A belief that continuity in the school setting is of value to young children.
- A belief that the traditional role of schools in society remains important.
- A belief that children's progress should be assessed by looking at their own growth rather than by comparing them with others in their age group.
- A belief that learners can be trusted.
- A belief that the teacher is also a learner.
- A belief that a wider-than-usual range of ages best supports these convictions.

Along with these beliefs, a review of the research literature reveals a number of characteristics that commonly describe multi-age education. The American Association of School Administrators (1992, p.7) lists characteristics of a non-graded primary which recur throughout the literature. These include: developmentally appropriate practice, a heterogeneous community of learners, holistic learning, activities conducive to active student involvement, uses school and community to apply skills in real-life situations, has the teacher as facilitator, emphasis on the process of learning, an integrated curriculum, flexible classroom structure, continuous progress, and authentic assessment. Each of these characteristics will be examined in turn in light of the research on multi-age education.

It can be agreed that many of these characteristics can describe single-age, graded classrooms. While this may be true to some extent, they are not necessarily consistent descriptions of single-age, graded classrooms. Herein lies the difference between graded and multi-age classrooms. A classroom cannot be described as multi-age unless these characteristics are present.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Maeda (1994, p.13) describes a flexible, developmentally appropriate curriculum created with the collaborative efforts of parents, teachers and students as one of the key components of the multi-age classroom. She states that it is "success-oriented" in that each child's developmental level is respected and celebrated. "Children progress at their own pace as they learn and interact with students of all ages and abilities." Sue Bredekamp (1987, p.62-66) refers to multi-age as "one strategy to implement the developmentally appropriate primary grades curricula." Theilheimer (1993, p.89) emphasizes the developmentally appropriate instruction as well when she mentions "matching curriculum to each child's stage of development while meeting individual needs of the child." Katz, Evangelou, and Hartman (1990, p.50) recommend that curriculum be broadly conceived and designed so that "teachers, principals, and parents understand that children are learning multi-dimensionally." Kasten and Clarke (1993, p.13) discuss the teacher facilitating a variety of teaching and learning experiences that "will be developmentally appropriate for students in the class, and that children will learn what they can from those experiences."

Heterogeneous Community of Learners

A second characteristic of multi-age teaching is that it consists of a heterogeneous community of learners in that it includes children at varying ages and abilities. Forester

and Reinhard (1994, p.26) advocate first and foremost establishing "a learning climate in the classroom." In reference to the teacher, they continue by saying:

> Acknowledging the uniqueness of each child, she makes it her first priority to create a community of learners in which all the children will feel comfortable to talk, join in activities, and work independently at their own levels and in ways that fit their particular needs and interests.

Bingham (1995, p.47) says that the strong sense of community and the helping attitudes are common features of a multi-age classroom. Bingham's "natural community of learners"

> become a "family" because they spend a longer time together. Since the class is made up of a natural mix of ages, with the teachers help it can take on some of the aspects of a family, supporting one another's growth and development, which in turn supports the teacher's goal of building a sense of community.

Holistic Learning

The American Association of School Administrators (1992, p.10) holds as a guiding principle that " a child learns as a total person." They identify a commitment to honoring the development of the whole child as a third characteristic. They state:

> Knowledge and skills must be learned through all areas...physical, social, emotional and intellectual...to help children learn how to learn and to establish the foundation for continuous lifelong learning.

Maeda (1994, p.12) affirms her belief in holistic learning as does Miller (1994, p.91) who says that multi-age education "promotes a focus on the whole child and creates an environment driven by child needs rather than curriculum." Bingham (1995, p.15) states that:

Children bring to school everything they are. The ability and motivation to learn depend on what is happening in other areas of their lives. Children have difficulty focusing if they are concerned about unresolved issues at home or on the playground. Physical health and well-being have a profound effect on learning, as does a child's social network or lack of one. Recognizing the needs of the whole child in the learning milieu requires an awareness of these issues.

Rathbone (1993, p.62) agrees when he says that the multi-age teacher values and promotes "wholeness". He refers here to "children being treated as possessors of thoughts and feelings and particular ways of moving in the world." He also speaks of the particular way a teacher plans events pertaining to a larger context which allows them to become flexible planners. The wholeness also exists in "situations in their stories where past events are linked to present events or home and school became linked through the work of a child."

Activities Conducive to Active Student Involvement

The American Association of School Administrators describes a multi-age classroom as one which is conducive to active student involvement—hands-on activities, classroom discussions and projects, concrete experiences related to real life examples, discovery, and student-initiated learning. Katz, Evangelou, and Hartman (1990, p. 50) suggest that the curriculum in a multi-age class should be oriented toward projects and activities that encourage and allow children to work collaboratively using structures of peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and spontaneous grouping characteristic of young children's play settings.

Rathbone (1993, p.61) observes multi-age teachers using "open-ended activity times intentionally" in order to assess what children do and how they do it. This gives teachers valuable information about each child's interests and self-selected style of learning. Rathbone believes that the "active, concrete learning experiences" characteristic of multi-age classrooms are essential for young children. Forester and Reinhard (1989, p.29) explain that "the climate of delight, rich in mental and physical stimulation, not only helps children to learn but actually ensures the full physical development of their brains."

Uses School and Community to Apply Skills in Real-Life Situations

Maeda (1994, p.14), in her description of multi-age education, mentions using the school and community to "enrich the curriculum and provide opportunities for children to apply skills in real-life situations." She advocates students being mobile and moving freely about the classroom to complete their chosen tasks and making "choices" in most curriculum areas (p.15). Shared-decision making and collaboration where students have input into projects and units of study as they pursue their daily goals also fit into her model of the multi-age classroom (p.16).

Forester and Reinhard (1994, p.208) describe a multi-age classroom as one in which children initiate and suggest many of the topics for discussion. "There is no question of coaxing a class of bored children into completing assignments. Lessons arise out of the children's own interests" they report.

Teacher as Facilitator

Another characteristic of the multi-age classroom involves the teacher operating as the classroom facilitator-modeling, monitoring, observing, and giving guided instruction. Maeda (1994, p. 6) describes her role as facilitating learning and serving as a resource for activities initiated by students. Forester and Reinhard (1989, p.24) say that modeling is a "safe way to learn." They feel that "observing , describing, listening, and keeping notes on children's behaviors are just part of the magic of letting children tell you what they are ready to learn" (1994, p.125).

Emphasis on Process of Learning

An emphasis on the process of learning is another of the characteristics of the multi-age classroom. Maeda (1994, p.14) values the learning of process more than the learning of facts. "Writing, conferencing, reading, reasoning, and problem-solving are all seen as processes rather than finished products." Forester and Reinhard (1994, p.133) add that "the need to work together in flexible groupings of necessity emphasizes the process of learning more than the acquisition of narrowly circumscribed content."

Integrated Curriculum

Providing an integrated curriculum across many subject areas so that children learn concepts and processes in a meaningful context is an additional characteristic. In Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain (1991) Renate and Geoffrey Caine

advocate a thematic approach and interdisciplinary learning as "methodologies for brain-based schooling." They explain that these approaches establish and support patterns and connections that are significant because the brain learns through patterns. Bingham (1995, p.79) adds that "by providing children with real experiences that are physical, sensory, creative and practical, we give them 'hooks' on which to hang new ideas."

Politano and Davies (1994, p.67) suggest rethinking instruction to increase connections. Integrating topics traditionally categorized separately involves children in

> formulating research questions, doing research, and presenting what they know to others not only builds on their fascination with the world and how it works but also provides them with practical applications for their basic skills.

Maeda (1994, p.15) sees integration as a defining feature of the multi-age curricular structure. She explains that "themes eliminate the artificial barriers between subjects." She suggests considering student and community interests when selecting topics for study. Forester and Reinhard (1989, p.208) agree when they speak of "weaving reading, writing and arithmetic into all activities during the day." They see this as "building the foundation for full functional literacy and frees the teacher to work with individuals and small groups who need or want extra attention."

Flexible Classroom Structure

Structuring the multi-age classroom so that it is free of rigid instructional structures that impede learning, such as fixed ability grouping, grade levels, retention and promotion is another characteristic. Justine O'Keefe (1993, as cited in Rathbone p.142)

uses open-ended activities, tailored to individual needs, abilities, interests, and developmental levels. This way she "provides a framework within which children function as the learners they are." Maeda (1994, p.15) promotes flexible grouping when teachers present direct instruction to individual children or small groups determined by student interests and needs. Kasten and Clarke (1993, p.48) endorse varying the way students are grouped at different times.

Continuous Progress

Grant and Johnson (1995, p. 57) define continuous progress to mean :

- looking at growth and learning over time.
- not setting a time frame and requiring an arbitrary amount of progress as the right amount. It is the opposite of a fixed curriculum to be learned in a fixed amount of time.
- sharing expectations with the student and then recognizing and acknowledging progress a child is making on a regular continuing basis.
- fitting instruction to a child's needs and pattern of learning.
- giving children responsibility both for learning and for evaluating their learning.
- giving children an environment that encourages and invites them to take this responsibility.
- challenging a child with high expectations.
- showing them that estimations, errors, mistakes, and "giving it a try," are steps along the road to success.
- giving children the opportunity to learn all the time and in different ways: from materials, books, other children, other adults, the teacher.
- teaching learning strategies as the child needs them.

Bev Maeda (1994, p.14), promotes continuous progress and authentic assessment that go beyond the activities and skills traditionally assigned to a specific grade level. In a multi-age organization, "Students help plan the learning; they determine when they are ready to move onto the next stage of development."

Authentic Assessment

Being evaluated continuously using multiple data sources such as portfolios,

anecdotal records, and samples of student work, as well as formal evaluation measures is

another characteristic of the multi-age classroom. Mary Garamella (1993) in her article

"Multiage Classrooms: Creating Communities for Learning" states that

> Teachers encourage and assess student strength on a continuing basis and
> record evidence of progress on skill continuums and in anecdotal records,
> reading logs, journals, and portfolios of student work. Children and adults
> demonstrate and celebrate success each day as they perform real-life tasks
> in real-life situations.
> All members of the school community see each other as enablers of
> learning.

Grant and Johnson (1995, p.98) concur when they speak of "authentic assessment

that goes on continually." They insist that it "reflects actual learning experiences that can

be documented through such means as observation, anecdotal records, work samples,

journals and conferences."

Additional Elements of the Multi-Age Classroom

Bev Maeda (1994, p.13) concurs adding her views on empowering students by

involving them in the decision-making process is important in her view. Organizing the

classroom to accommodate different learning styles is necessary along with authentic

assessment which occurs during instruction and process learning. Choice and mobility

are integral parts of a multiage class as are shared decision-making, collaboration, risk-

taking and parental involvement.

Rathbone (1993, p.28-30) identified seven elements of the teaching and learning environment. He begins with the continuity in the classroom which connects past happenings in the lives of the children to create a setting that is familiar, known, and that has stability and predictability for them. Family follows as a kind of "one for all, all for one" attitude that creates a basic understanding shared by everyone in the class that they are all in this together. The third element of grouping describes the variety of ways the children gather together (self-selected) or are placed together (intentional) during different times of the classroom day for purposes of teaching and learning. Informality is the fourth element describing the ambiance in the teaching and learning environment. Interaction describes the variety of encounters the children have with other children, adults, places and things in the classroom, school, and community. Routine, the sixth element, is a term used to describe those things that occur in the room with regularity, usually daily. The seventh element, overlappingness, describes the interdependent nature of family, interaction, grouping, continuity, routine and informality. Rathbone (1993, p.31) identifies the central characteristic as a teaching and learning environment organized for the way children learn.

Rathbone (1993, p.60) reports on the list of eleven characteristics of multi-age teaching and learning from the teacher's perspective as created by his writing collective. These include:

- The teacher has a perspective centered in child responsive learning.
- The teacher is both teacher and learner.
- The teacher plans for spontaneous moments.

- The teacher uses open-ended activity times intentionally.
- The teacher plans for learning that runs deep.
- The teacher values and promotes wholeness.
- The teacher understands and promotes continuity.
- The teacher promotes a community of learners.
- The teacher promotes active learning.
- The teacher values different kinds of learning.
- The teacher promotes conversation.

Ann Bingham (1995, p.7) reinforces the importance of the children's developmental diversity in the multi-age class when she says it is to be "celebrated, valued as part of a natural community of learners, and harnessed in subtle ways to support learning. The publication CELT (1991) in its article "The Mixed-Age Primary" would agree when saying "the mix of abilities as well as the mix of ages is seen not as a problem but as a wonderful resource to be celebrated and used for the benefit of all."

Multi-age teaching is an approach which is child-centered. It employs strategies which move the child from where s/he is developmentally to the next level within the community of learners. Students become actively involved in the learning using the school and community to apply the skills obtained to real life situations. The teacher becomes the facilitator in the process using an integrated curriculum. The classroom is structured to be flexible and uses continuous progress and authentic assessment as the children perform their chosen tasks. The continuity from year to year with the same teacher enhances the feeling of belonging and safety which allows risk-taking and choices. The flexible grouping and interaction promotes learning on the students own terms. The routine becomes comfortable and adaptable. The overlappingness allows the

learner to proceed when it is desirable for them. The whole concept enables the entire class to become a family in an environment conducive to developmentally appropriate practice.

The Educational Advantages of Multi-Age Classrooms

The advantages of multi-age grouping have been investigated by several researchers in the late 1960's and early 1970's to the present time. Mycock (1967) notes a variety of affective gains for children. She suggests that pupils in multi-age classrooms have a greater sense of belonging, support, security, and confidence than pupils in same-age classrooms. She believes that in a multi-age classroom, the child has a chance to form relationships with a wider variety of children than is possible in a traditional setting. She asserts that multi-age grouping promotes the development of a balanced personality by fostering attitudes and qualities that enable children to lead happy, well-adjusted lives in a complex and changing social environment. Furthermore, multi-age grouping offers ample opportunity for each child to be a leader and a follower, she says. According to Mycock, children in these groups are responsible, relaxed, interested, confident, full of zest; they have good work attitudes and high aspirations. Teachers seem to develop a greater sense of rapport with their pupils. Stress is minimized. She sees essential features including an integrated day with emphasis on pupil-selected activities and projects.

Stehney (1970) sees multi-age grouping as helping children gain self-confidence

by providing opportunities for success. Teaching such a diverse group of pupils almost demands individualized instruction. She also believes that when older, slower children are asked to tutor younger children in the class, their self-confidence is enhanced. She notes that pupils form friendships with children younger and older than themselves. Children in multi-age classrooms, she asserts, tend to have better general personal and social adjustment than children in same-age classrooms.

Franklin (1976) supports multi-age grouping on the basis of cognitive as well as affective gains. She feels that multi-age grouping enhances emotional-social qualities. The younger children develop affection and admiration for the older children, and the older children develop protective attitudes toward the younger ones. She feels that identification with the teacher is increased in the multi-age group in arrangements that allow the child to stay with the same teacher at least two and sometimes three years.

Ridgway and Lawton (1965) justify family grouping on the grounds that it gives children an increased sense of security and stability, and promotes poise, enjoyment, and confidence. They also believe that in family grouping children are encouraged to help one another. The older children model more mature behavior, particularly responsibility and independence, for the younger ones and become more thoughtful of them in the process.

According to Katz, Evangelou, and Hartman (1990, p. 27) the concepts of cognitive conflict and the zone of proximal development provide some theoretical justification for experimenting with education in mixed-age grouping in the early years.

Brown and Palincsar (1986, p. 31) make the point that such conflict's contribution to learning is not simply that the less informed child imitates the more knowledgeable one. The interactions between those who hold conflicting understandings lead the less informed member to internalize new understandings in the form of "fundamental cognitive restructuring". Along the same lines, Vygotsky (1978) maintains that internalization occurs when concepts are actually transformed and not merely replicated. Thus the kinds of cognitive conflict likely to arise during cross-age interaction provide contexts for significant learning for younger children as they strive to accommodate to the different understandings presented by older classmates.

As Brown and Palincsar (1986, p.31) point out, a child can learn effectively from another only when the less informed child already has a partial grasp of the concept in question. In other words, for cognitive conflict to be effective, the concepts being learned must exist between the points of the child's actual and potential ability, or in Vygotsky's term, within the child's "zone of proximal development."

Slavin (1987, p.1162) points out that the discrepancy between what an individual can do with and without assistance can be the basis for cooperative efforts that can result in cognitive gains. In his view, "collaborative activity among children promotes growth because children of similar ages are likely to be operating within one another's proximal zone of development, modeling in the collaborating group behaviors more advanced than those they could perform as individuals."

Katz, Evangelou, and Hartman (1990, p.26) suggest that if learning tasks involve

children working together instead of individually or competitively, fruitful collaboration between "novices" and "experts" can occur. Research by Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, and Campione (1983) and Brown and Reeve (1985 as cited in Katz, Evangelou & Hart 1990, p. 26) supports Vygotsky's contention that learning experiences are most likely to enhance development when children's activities are socially directed by "experts." Experts are more capable people who provide prompts to increasingly advanced solutions, direct leading questions, and cause "novices" to defend or alter their theories. The notion that supportive social contexts create new levels of competence, then, defends the use of mixed-age grouping, in which ranges of competence offer varying levels of cognition.

Bev Maeda (1994, p.10) cites numerous advantages for both students and teachers in the multi-age program. Advantages for students include the following:

- Children progress at their own pace because grade level barriers are eliminated.
- Older children develop leadership skills as they work with and help younger students.
- Younger children quickly learn class routines and appropriate behavior when they can see older students models.
- Siblings learn together as an extension of the family group. Younger students feel safe because they are with their siblings.
- Individual differences are valued because children are allowed to choose their activities.
- Children receive greater personal attention as there are more adults available to provide assistance.
- Competition is reduced because children work on self-selected activities and progress at their own rate.
- Children learn to collaborate as they interact with different grade and age levels.
- Social growth increases because children have more time to develop

caring relationships.
- Learning is enriched when students share their personal experiences in cross grade-level groups.

Day and Hunt (1975, p.459) would agree with the advantages in relation to younger and older students working together. They argue that it "increases the children's security and achievement by increasing the amount of help they give one another." They continue by adding that multi-age grouping "fosters socialization of younger children into the academic setting." Their final point speaks of lightening teachers' loads and allowing them to better meet the individual needs of their pupils.

Bev Maeda (1994, p.11) lists the advantages for teachers as follows:

- Teachers and students develop meaningful relationships when they share common experiences over a longer time.
- Because parents are actively involved in the classroom for more than one year, there is greater communication and support between home and school.
- Behavior problems are reduced and often eliminated when children are free to interact, move around, and make choices.
- Students are motivated to learn as they take ownership of their learning.
- Teachers are able to provide a comprehensive record of student progress because they evaluate students over a longer period of time.
- Retentions and referrals to resource programs are reduced or eliminated when students have more than one year to meet their goals.
- The wide range of grade levels necessitates small group and individualized instruction.

The American Association of School Administrators (1992, pp.5-6) developed a set of common beliefs about the benefits of the non-graded primary held by school, district and state initiatives across the country. These include:

- The nongraded primary frees children from an arbitrary time frame. Children grow and develop at different rates in their early years. In the nongraded primary, teachers do not arbitrarily make a determination about whether students are ahead or behind when they are five, six, or seven years old.
- Children can work with other children who are at various levels. In doing so, they learn a great deal through social interaction. The classroom becomes a laboratory for learning. Whether the child is the brightest or slowest, he or she can operate at his or her own level in a group.
- Teachers change from being a transmitter of knowledge to a more active role of supporter, guide, and facilitator of children's learning. Teachers can see the natural strengths of a child and develop those strengths, rather than seeing the child as something to be "fixed."
- Teachers are able to make sure that learning takes place. Children can have the same teacher or teaching team for more than one year. This approach allows teachers to use what they have learned about a child in the first year for planning learning experiences the next year.
- Parent-teacher communication is enhanced. The nongraded primary recognizes the immediate and important relationship between parents and teachers in the education of an individual child and the quality of education the child receives.
- The educational opportunity for all children, including those from poor and minority families is improved. For example, many districts use readiness tests that disproportionately identify minority and poor children as being "unready" for school. In the nongraded setting, schools do not exclude young children on the basis of tests-particularly poor children who have the most to gain from early educational opportunities.

Techniques for Classroom Management

Bingham (1995, p.198) thinks of classroom management as turning over as much responsibility as possible to the students. She does not expect this to occur overnight but rather allows procedures and modelling to help children understand what is expected and what their role might be. Ownership of the classroom is shared with students (Bingham 1995, p.199). She has students participate in making rules which are clearly posted. She

holds high expectations of work and appropriate behavior. Her classroom follows an established routine where children share the chores and both teachers and student led meetings.

Janet Banks (1995, pp. 59-66) makes numerous other suggestions for classroom management which any teacher hoping to begin a multi-age approach should consider. These include:

- Work with a team partner, if possible, or at least with another multi-age teacher.
- Share responsibilities with your team member.
- Open up your classroom slowly, as you and your students become ready.
- Establish discipline expectations and classroom rules.
- Explain standards for group behavior.
- Teach students to be cooperative learners.
- Start early with activities in which children have to cooperate.
- Have students evaluate group behaviors regularly.
- Have students evaluate their own behavior in group situations.
- Establish guidelines for working independently without bothering others.
- Establish guidelines for learning centers.
- Give clear oral and written instructions for independent work.
- Praise students and groups who are staying on task.
- Expect students to come to each class prepared.
- Encourage students to get help from each other as needed.
- Post assignments and due dates so children will know when work must be completed.
- Include expectations and due dates for projects in letters to parents.

Curriculum

Banks (1995, p. 37) found the results of curriculum changes are quite beneficial to students when a multi-age class is created:

Students will feel successful in all areas of growth. They will be more mature and will be able to make wise choices and decisions. They will progress at a faster rate through the curriculum, as they make continuous progress, and will be able to solve problems for themselves. They will know their own learning styles and strengths and will choose activities that are appropriate. They will be able to use both oral and written language more effectively.

Children will have experience with word processors and will be able to do their own typing. They will begin speaking a foreign language. They will have a greater appreciation for the arts. Teachers will see greater student growth in dependability, responsibility, and independence, as children have increased interest and motivation.

In order to achieve these benefits, she has outlined several ways to make changes

to the curriculum including:

- Integrate the subject areas.
- Use interdisciplinary curriculum.
- Create thematic units.
- Follow interests and abilities of students.
- Accommodate learning styles, brain dominance and multiple intelligence.
- Use children's literature for language instruction.
- Emphasize the writing process, whole language.
- Use basals as supplements.
- Provide self-pacing, self-directed activities.
- Promote continuous individual progress.
- Stress creative and critical thinking.
- Emphasize higher level thinking skills.
- Include typing and keyboarding instruction.
- Teach word processing skills.
- Work with the latest in technology.
- Include foreign language instruction.

Instructional Strategies

As a result of changes in instructional strategies, Banks (1995, p. 25) believes

"Students will show a more positive attitude toward school, toward each other, and

toward learning." She identified several instructional strategies that would motivate

students to learn. These include:

- Facilitate learning of individuals.
- Stress small group and individualized instruction.
- Provide some whole group instruction.
- Mainstream special needs students.
- Use remediation specialists working in classrooms.
- Guide learning by establishing scope and sequence.
- Obtain materials and place them where children can find them.
- Guide students working cooperatively in pairs or in teams.
- Use different grouping configurations.
- Change grouping configurations throughout the day.
- Use learning centers for small group work or individual work.
- Emphasize peer tutoring.
- Stress peer evaluation.
- Utilize research for gaining knowledge.
- Use parent volunteers.
- Train older students as volunteers.
- Give students choice in learning activities.
- Use inquiry methods for science instruction.

By using these strategies, Banks (1995, p. 25) assures that:

Students will display more interest in school activities and will be further
motivated for learning. They will have a greater curiosity and will show greater
development in areas of strength. They will exhibit a stronger desire to cooperate,
due to increased interaction with peers, and will demonstrate better empathy and
understanding of others.

A Critique of the Graded Approach to Schooling

The current system of grouping pupils by grades developed partly in response to

the public school movement's demand for efficient ways to organize large numbers of

children (Goodlad & Anderson 1987, p.22), not from any research base. Other reasons

for setting up this system include the role of European instructional influences, teacher

training schools, the textbook industry and standardized testing in institutionalizing a system predicated on mastery of specific items at specific grade levels (Cohen 1990).

Critics of the system have argued that it fails to accommodate wide variations in children's rates of learning, and have decried the use of "social promotion," retention, and grade skipping to place students who fall behind or move ahead of their grade level peers. Most recently, educators and child psychologists have raised concerns about the effects of rigid academic programs and early grade retention on young pupils, whose developmental patterns vary widely and who are particularly vulnerable to being stigmatized as slow learners (Cohen 1990).

Alfred Ellison (1972, p.212) has discussed the anachronistic nature of gradedness as an organizational structure because of its disregard for individual considerations. The graded structure, Ellison argues, reinforces the use of graded series of textbooks, which has become a deeply ingrained educational practice. He points out that there is a "myth behind graded content" and that graded classrooms and graded textbooks have little justification in research or philosophy and in fact, often become stumbling blocks to progress.

Kasten and Clarke (1993, p.7) point out certain assumptions underlying unit-level grading which they consider to be erroneous. These include presupposing a transmission model of teaching and learning where the teacher orally delivers knowledge and information which is accepted and absorbed by students. Next, there is the assumption that children grouped within approximately one chronological year of each other will

have similar learning needs and abilities, and thus will benefit similarly from instruction. The view that learning is an orderly, sequential, and hierarchial process has been replaced by research regarding learning as cognition-- the process of knowing and perceiving, and identifying learning as complex, fluid, and dynamic rather than as hierarchical and sequential. The assumption that there is only one teacher in the class, has changed to that of a community of interactive learners. Finally, assuming that a year of schooling is not an educational process but a product with some standard upon which that product can be judged and rated is a myth in their view.

Grant and Johnson (1995, p.28) discuss two assumptions about gradedness: that all children learn at the same pace and that all the children in the grade are the same age. The problem, in their view, lies in the fact that every child must have the basic skills and information that are specified for that age/grade. The children are tested against what they call "an artificial time barrier." They see failure as being built into this model which really does not reflect how children grow and learn.

Bingham (1995, p.7) states that "uniform grade-levels tend to exclude those children who don't fit in intensifying the experience of success or failure." Rathbone (1993, p.xii) views gradedness as creating issues of "which child is best" and "which child is worst" that results in status differences for children in the classroom organization. According to Maeda (1994, p. 8), "the traditional single grade level philosophy assumes that all children are expected to progress at the same pace and learn in the same way."

Gradedness began as a solution to an organizational problem in the 1800's. It was adopted and has evolved into the present day model to which most people have become accustomed. The research points to another approach to educating children-- that of using a multi-age philosophy which is just as effective and may even be more effective for social and emotional development. There is enough evidence in the literature to warrant considering its use in the primary and elementary levels and possibly beyond with modifications to fit the need. It is definitely an approach that fits the child rather than having the child fit the school.

Conclusions from the Literature

The multi-age approach to teaching and learning uses developmentally appropriate practice to meet the developmental needs of children of varying ages and abilities in the same classroom. It is a child-centered approach that can be found in classrooms where flexibility of structure allows interaction and mobility between children of different ages and promotes a hands-on, activity oriented process. It celebrates differences and allows those who often see themselves at the bottom of the class to eventually see the view from the top. It features a holistic approach to the social, emotional and physical well being of the child along with his/her academic development. It produces a community of learners where the younger children see the older children model routines and where older children nurture the younger ones. Students learn to work collaboratively through open-ended activities and play in order to develop their full range of social and cognitive experience.

The multi-age class becomes an interactive community of teachers and learners. The teacher is the facilitator who models, monitors, observes and gives guided instruction. By incorporating the foundations of functional literacy into daily activities, the teacher is freed to work with individuals and small groups. The emphasis is on the process of learning where writing, conferencing, reading, reasoning and problem-solving are used regularly. An integrated curriculum helps relate all of the activities and encourages choice, responsibility and life-long learning in the classroom.

The continuity from year to year provides a safe, secure environment where children are willing to take risks. The teacher develops a rapport with the children over a period of time and trusts the students as learners. For all of these reasons, multi-age teaching should be considered as a viable alternative to the existing graded system because it encourages a teaching and learning environment organized for the way children learn.

Chapter 3

Methodology

"Man," says the moral philosopher MacIntyre (1981 as cited in Connelly & Clandinin 1988, p. 24) "is essentially a story telling animal." As teachers, we have many stories to tell about various aspects of our lives. In writing these stories, or teacher narratives, (Eisner 1988, as cited in Connelly and Clandinin p.x) several purposes are served. It is one method of telling what is going on in our professional lives. It allows others to understand what we experience, not just focus on what we do. It provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own personal practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 25) and figure out new ways of acting or teaching in the future. Readers of these stories are able to identify with experiences from the classroom. "Practicing teachers respond more openly and willingly to colleagues' stories about their lives as teachers than they do to the facts and figures of conventional educational research" (Rathbone 1993, p. 56). The life stories, which are a form of qualitative inquiry, will be investigated to consider what has influenced them, how they help change the practice of teaching and learning in our schools, and how we learn about our knowledge of curriculum from learning about curriculum as narrative (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 213).

"Narrative is the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 24). The use of narrative as a form of inquiry and analysis is increasingly recognized in pedagogical research and

teacher development as a source of significant knowledge and useful insight into education and schooling (Cortazzi 1993, Patterson 1993, Stake 1995, Alford 1998, Altricker 1993 and Croll 1986). Teachers, as knowledgeable and knowing persons, have a way of knowing their classrooms. It is not only objective, conceptual and found in books. It can be found in a person's past experience, in the person's present mind and body, and in the person's future plans and actions (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 25). This personal practical knowledge is a particular way of restructuring the past and the intentions for the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 25). As we write narratives, we take in to account our whole life and see that our reactions to different situations occur because of the past experiences we have lived.

Teachers accumulate knowledge from many sources. These will be discussed in the form of commonplaces of curriculum (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 84). This set of factors or determinants that occur in the statements about aims, content and the methods of curriculum include learner, teacher, milieu and subject matter. Teachers tell stories about their childhood, including memories of their homes, their families and their communities. They reflect on their experiences as learners in those situations as well as from being in school, in university, through professional development, and inservice courses. They also "learn from reflecting on their understanding of theories and research in education" (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 199). Teachers learn from the process of teaching, from students they work with in and out of their classes and from other teachers

(Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 203). Their curricular milieu provides another learning opportunity as well as having to learn new concepts from a particular subject matter that has to use a particular approach with which the teacher is not familiar (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 213). Through these commonplaces, teachers learn about the knowledge of curriculum from learning about curriculum as narrative. As we "think of our own experience as a text" (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 213) we see that the more we reflect and write about these experiences, the more we understand.

As we explore the idea of curriculum planning as curriculum inquiry (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 185), it becomes noticeable that curriculum change occurs in a classroom through an individual teacher's curriculum inquiry. Central to this narrative understanding of curriculum is the teacher's personal practical knowledge. Everything that a teacher has experienced to this point, along with what the teacher hopes to accomplish in the future, influences classroom practices and shapes the ways in which he/she knows the classroom. During the planning process, there is a reconstruction of personal practical knowledge as old practices are questioned, new practices are tried, and teachers come to know their teaching and practices in new ways (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 185).

Rathbone (1993, p. 56) tells of a Writing Project with several multi-age classroom teachers as a qualitative inquiry grounded in the narrative voice of teachers writing about events in their teaching. He was looking for events that held significant meaning for their teaching lives which helped to define themselves as teachers. The stories he was looking

for--the moments of epiphany--were likened to the interpretation of story as associated

with Norman Denizen's (1989) notion of interpretive interactionism:

> "As a distinctly qualitative approach to social research, interpretive interactionism attempts to make the world of lived experiences directly accessible to the reader.... "The focus of interpretive research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects. This existential thrust sets this research apart from other interpretive approaches that examine the more mundane, taken-for-granted properties and features of everyday life. It leads to a focus on 'epiphany'"

Maxine Greene (1988) captures the meaning of these experiences when she argues

powerfully for us to pay more attention to the narrative voice:

> "We who are teacher educators need to direct our attention now and then to memory and lived life. If we do so, we cannot but summon up visions of the landscapes that ground our own and our students' life stories, out of which one's quest for the valuable, the worthwhile, and the meaningful must begin....If thoughtfulness is important to us in more than a limited formal sense, there must be room for the interpretive, the grounded, the perspectival, the qualitative."

Another term in the language of practice for teachers is that of narrative unity.

"Narrative unity is a continuum within a person's experience and renders life experiences

meaningful through the unity they achieve for the person (Connelly and Clandinin 1988,

p. 74). Here again, the interpretation of our history provides a way of understanding our

experiential knowledge. Connelly and Clandinin (1988, p. 75) explain that it is

> "a thread or theme that runs through the narrative of experience and that provides a way to see how the rules, principles, images, and metaphors relate to one another as they are called out in practical situations in which we find ourselves."

Therefore, when we look at our past experiences, we are able to consider how and

why we act the way we do in present situations, and be guided toward certain practices in

the future.

Berk (1980) uses the term biographic narrative. This term is both personal in the sense of biography and developmental and process-oriented in the sense of a narrative. He emphasizes developing ideas that are found and grow in classroom practice rather than fixed ideas of the past and present. Pinar's (1975) reference to "currere" takes into account the curriculum a person has experienced is found in both the private and professional life of that person's past. As was stated before, many variables influence a teacher's knowing of the classroom and dispositions in the classroom.

As I considered writing a narrative as the method to be used in this thesis about becoming a competent multi-age teacher, my first thoughts were questions. Why would I want to write a narrative? Who would want to read it? Why would anyone be interested in my story? What would I get out of it?

While reviewing the literature on narratives and personal practical knowledge, the answers to some of my questions became apparent. Although this type of educational research is relatively new, it has allowed me to develop descriptions of my culture as a teacher which helps preserve my voice. As other teachers tell stories, anecdotes and reflect upon past experiences, they too, organize their thoughts into special patterns which represent and explain experience. This window on the mind in action demonstrates both its contents and ongoing operations. Therefore, through the process of narrative analysis a window may be opened on the mind of a practicing reflective teacher.

Current trends relating to teachers point to the importance of teachers' narratives.

Along with the concepts of voice and reflection is added the nature of teachers'
knowledge. Explorations of what teachers know, how they think and learn professionally
or make decisions in the classroom is a clearly developing strand of research about
teaching (Calderhead 1988).

The literature review helped me realize that I am the person I am in the classroom
today because of the many experiences I have had up to this point in my life. Theory and
practice have come together for me as I understand what I know about teaching and am
able to create new and informed meanings. Consequently theory has emerged from my
practice and theory had informed my practice. My childhood experiences, my education,
my experiences as learner, as teacher, interacting in various milieu with students, teachers
and numerous other people, using a wide range of subject matter, have all contributed to
my personal practical knowledge.

As I read the literature on multi-age classrooms, I became aware of the struggle
other teachers have gone through in their attempts to become the best teachers they can be
and provide the best educational opportunities possible for their students. I became
aware, as did many other multi-age teachers, of how much my own children taught me
and how I questioned my teaching practices, and my philosophy because of what I learned
from them. I began trying new methods, often unsuccessfully, often without support and
leadership, as did many others I read about. I realized how much I enjoyed reading other
teachers' stories and was able to see myself in what they wrote and empathize with their
dilemmas. I was also inspired by other stories of success and determination.

As for what I will get out of it, the knowledge that I have gained while conducting the review of the literature and the process of writing thus far is immeasurable. Having the opportunity to consider my past practices, find new ideas that I may try, see my narrative as text, reflect upon it and hopefully change some of my classroom practices, is invaluable. Realizing that "learning, which never stops in education is an experiential continuum" (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, p. 212) reinforces many of my thoughts and boosts my self-esteem as learner, as teacher, as person. It makes the term "life-long learner" applicable not only to students in the classroom, but also to the teacher as learner. It allows me to model the idea of curricular inquiry and improves my ability to share this experience with other teachers. It permits me to evaluate my career as a teacher and encourages me to continue my journey to become a competent multi-age practitioner.

Statement of Research Question

This autobiographical study records the experiences of the researcher in making the change from teaching in a single age, graded classroom, followed by teaching in a multi-grade classroom to teaching in a multi-age continuous progress classroom.

These experiences will be recounted in the form of a narrative. From this, the researcher will explore the narrative segments in order to identify patterns of meaning-- events, processes, themes--that are evident in the shift from believing and practicing 'traditional methods' of instruction (defined as single-age and graded organizations), to organizing a multi-grade classroom (defined as combining two or more grade levels and

teaching each grade level separately within the same classroom), to believing in and practicing multi-age continuous progress methods of instruction (defined as two or more ages and ungraded).

It is predicted that the themes, patterns and principles that will emerge will enable other teachers to identify and better understand the conditions necessary to make a change from the instructional philosophy and practices commonly associated with single age, graded classrooms, or multi-grade classrooms, to the philosophy and practices associated with multi-age continuous progress classrooms.

Chapter 4

A Narrative Journey: Traveling Without a Compass

As I reflect on my childhood experiences, my school days, my years in university, and the beginning years of my teaching career, I realize that these experiences, recounted in the form of a narrative, may be a valuable means of identifying patterns of meaning in my professional growth and development. The events, processes and themes which emerge from the narrative may help account for a change from my belief in, and practice of, 'traditional methods' of instruction to my belief in, and practice of, multi-age continuous progress methods of instruction. Furthermore, the emerging patterns and principles may help other teachers to identify the conditions necessary to change from a belief in the philosophy and practices of single age classrooms to a belief in the philosophy and practices of multi-age continuous progress classrooms.

In order to facilitate this process, it is necessary to describe my interpretation of what constituted a traditional education in a traditional, single-grade classroom. My impressions result from schooling in the late 1950's and early 1960's. I attended an urban school which was organized into single grade classrooms containing students of approximately the same age. The only exception I can recall occurred when children who entered at about age six were required to attend kindergarten for the first part of the year, and then to continue on with the Grade One curriculum for the remainder of the year. Otherwise, classrooms consisted of same age children being taught by one teacher who was seated at the front of the class with the blackboard behind and children, in rows, facing the front.

In my experience with a traditional, graded classroom the teacher was in total

control of the class. Seats were arranged in rows, workbooks were placed on shelves, and students followed a timetable of subjects predetermined by the teacher. Charts recording results of spelling tests and health inspections were displayed on the walls and stars were placed on the charts to indicate those who had performed well. Students spoke only when they were given permission to speak. Textbooks were taken from desks at the teacher's bidding, passages were read, and work was assigned regardless of its relevance to students. The curriculum had a narrow focus with a heavy emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic. Art provided the only creative outlet and, even then, 'creativity' was restricted by tasks which most often involved coloring, or copying from a model provided by the teacher. Assigned work was completed by the pupil alone, and the teacher provided the only, albeit infrequent, assistance. Listening, reading and writing skills were emphasized. Spelling words were learned from a graded speller used by the whole class and these words were tested each Friday. Reading was performed orally from basal readers with each child being required to have a turn reading a passage, sometimes practiced the night before. Silent reading from a kit containing timed lessons was a prevalent strategy in language arts as were guided lessons and repetitious drill in math classes.

A requisite amount of printing or writing was performed daily and workbooks and worksheets abounded. While the teacher often read the lesson, the student was required to absorb the knowledge and give it back verbatim at a later date. Grade 4 students were required to write formal exams three times a year and were given percentage marks for

their efforts. Exam results were duly recorded on the board and ranked according to level of achievement.

Coming from a household where children did as they were told, none of this appeared out of the ordinary. It was natural to follow the rules or get a strap on the hands for back answering, talking without permission to a peer, or not following the teacher's instructions without question. Most students conformed or faced the consequences. Disruptive students and those who did not perform their work were rare. Everything appeared under control and on schedule. Students moved by row when the bell rang and only when they were given permission. Students lined up to enter school, to leave school, and even to go to the bathroom. Most students walked to school and were on time. Good students listened; bad students did not do what they were told and got into trouble. In other words, regardless of ability, all students were expected to complete the same assignments and to achieve at least a passing grade of fifty percent. While some of the rules became a little more flexible in junior and senior high, instructional methodologies remained the same. The teacher lectured and ensured that each chapter was covered. Students listened and wrote paper and pencil tests. Averages were taken of the test marks accumulated over the year in each subject, and these results were reported to parents on a formal report card. Some of the students who did not conform were sent to the office or expelled; others learned to cope and to find other outlets in extra curricular activities that helped them maintain an interest in school.

The preceding describes my background prior to entering university. During my first two years of pre-service training at university, however, I experienced little difference in the approach to instruction from what I had experienced in high school.

The Journey Begins: Teaching in Traditional and Multi-Grade Classrooms

As I approached my first teaching assignment as a substitute teacher, I felt mixed emotions. On the one hand, I was really excited about the prospect of actually teaching a class; on the other, I dreaded the thought of entering a grade ten science class when I had no background or methodology courses in the subject. I also was intimidated by the fact that I was only a couple of years older than several of the students in the class. I really did not know how to do what I was supposed to do.

Several features in my first classroom triggered memories of my own schooling: the arrangement of the small single-graded class in rows, with the teacher at the front behind a wooden desk; the bell signaling the start of class; the textbooks made available for the class; and all eyes on me anticipating what I would say. I did what I had seen others do in most of my primary and senior years in school. I picked up the text, found out on what page the students were working and proceeded to read the text, word for word. We made it through the afternoon although I do not know who suffered more—those who had to bear with me through the textbook drudgery, or me, facing a classroom I hardly knew how to handle. The charade continued even after I was hired in a full-time position teaching grades eight and nine just a week or two later when the school was under staffed by one.

Familiar from my own schooling with single-grade, same-aged students in a class, I now found myself facing two grades in the same class and double the curriculum to teach. Coupled with that, I was required to teach a few more courses to grades ten and eleven. I had never even heard the term multi-grade much less be familiar with the approach. The term had never arisen during my two years at university, and on-the-job training was my only recourse.

Consulting with the staff was first on the agenda. I felt I would benefit from their experiences as long-term, multi-grade teachers. Their advice was rather limited at first, consisting of comments such as, "Do the best you can." While they were a friendly staff, their work was done in isolation, a common method of working at that time. They would share any resources they had although these were somewhat limited. As for classroom organization, a colleague suggested teaching one grade-level for half the period while the others were working on a worksheet. Then the groups would switch. Students were required to complete the work on their own without communicating with other students. Collaboration was considered to be cheating. In those days, the quieter the class, the better the teacher.

It took all of my time outside of class just to keep up with the reading, barely staying ahead of the lessons. The rest of the time was spent making up worksheets to keep everyone busy and on task. The task of correcting student work was formidable; therefore, as much as possible was corrected by the students who exchanged work with each other for this purpose while the teacher wrote the correct answer on the board. Because student work consisted primarily of fill-in the-blank worksheets, there was little

focus on analysis and synthesis of information. This model served me well as long as the students could read, and until I took particular note of a student who was always smiling and friendly.

I went by this student's desk to see how his work was progressing only to find that not much had been accomplished at all. I tried to get him to read some of the worksheet questions, and I realized that, although he was in grade eight, he could not read the material in front of him. He was rather embarrassed and I did not know what to think. I told him to finish the worksheet for homework, and later spoke to several teachers only to find out that they had known about his problem, but were unable to make any headway with him. At that time, there were no teacher allocations for special education nor was there anyone with whom to consult at the District Office, as far as I knew. As well, I felt incapable of handling forty students with diverse abilities. Because I believed that all students were supposed to be at the same level, I could not see any advantage to having a wide range of abilities in the same class. Therefore, I contacted the parents of this poor boy and told them that their child could not read. The result was that, with parental permission, the student was removed from the class and set up in a small class by himself. This would allow him to work at his own pace and to catch up on some basic skills.

Unfortunately, my schedule did not allow much time for this needy student. Sometimes the student finished the assigned work quickly and then sat idly by, and sometimes the tasks were inappropriate or too easy for this older boy. In hindsight, I realize that removing this boy from the regular class and marking him as having a reading

problem neither improved his lot nor solved my problem about appropriate instructional strategies. Furthermore, the stigma attached to the move was a high price to pay for a problem that was not the student's fault or one that he could solve himself even with some remediation. He was soon back in the class, smiling and failing, although he was a very talented and inquisitive boy who needed some alternatives to the academic program—the only choice in our class. Meeting this student's need was difficult given the scarcity of human and material resources, limited access to new approaches or ideas, and almost non-existent opportunities for professional development.

Two specific activities in which this particular class participated hold a completely different significance for me now than it did at the time. For a change of pace, another teacher and I decided to take the grades eight to eleven students into the woods for a day during the winter. We were going to light the fire, boil the kettle, have a lunch, hold a few snowshoe races and enjoy the day. The teachers just stood back while the experts (students) went to work. They beat down a spot to build a fire and gathered fire wood and birch bark. They built the fire quickly and had the kettle on and the lunches out in a matter of minutes. The skill and dexterity they demonstrated along with all of the enterprising characteristics they exhibited were never given any credit. This was just considered a fun day out of class. It held no other relevance academically. I did not consider its value socially or emotionally nor did I consider the leadership skills and problem solving strategies that were engaged. Another teachable moment was lost.

The other activity which interested the class occurred accidentally during an art class. I asked if anyone could knit or crochet. Many could, and, as it turned out, they had several other skills and talents. Some brought frames to hook rugs. Others had parents who knit covers for pillows or painted on cloth. Still others filled snowshoes or carved wooden ornaments. I did not, however, give thought to how they could further develop those skills. Furthermore, I did not invite parents in for demonstrations, have students continue to work on projects, or have an art gallery or exhibit. Students kept asking for more time at the activities, and I kept telling them that it was not on the time table that day. If it wasn't in the book, it wasn't part of the curriculum. Students' interests were only a passing topic of conversation, not a starting point for goals and objectives for the year.

As a matter of fact, we had very little practice in using goals and objectives. Our only goal was to finish as much of the textbook as possible that year. If there were twelve chapters in the social studies for grade eight and the same number for grade nine, we tried to complete all of them for each grade. It was an impossible task. There was insufficient time to complete the texts for the two courses. That's why I often felt as if I were not doing as good a job as teachers in the larger centers. That's why the image of the multi-grade class was embarrassing to me and often maligned by others. That's why the school board could offer single-grade classes as a compensation for closing small schools and get away with it.

Leadership was lacking in the rural areas. Do-your-best-with-what-you-have was the attitude. The school board was too far removed from most of the smaller places, and the gravel roads made the rift even larger. At the school level, leadership often was lacking because those hired as principals were less likely to have the desire and the training needed than they were to be given the job because nobody else wanted it. Professional development was not available so there was little help for teachers who did not have the necessary pre-service training. Teachers may have been good friends, but they operated almost completely in isolation as professionals.

Evaluation of student progress and achievement was handled solely through chapter test marks and exam marks which were averaged out and written on a report card. The only time we would see parents in the school was on parent-teacher night. They would come into the class on that particular night and be given a report on their child's attitude toward school, behavior, effort, and whether or not the child was "on grade level." Other than that, not much was said. This ritual was performed twice a year and a final report indicating whether the child "passed or failed" was issued in June. Informally in the local store, at the post office or at a social event like a bake sale or darts, parents would occasionally bring up the topic of school and how their child was managing. Usually parents were reassured that if there was a problem, they would be contacted. There were few efforts made to invite parents into the school other than on those formal occasions. Parents' opinions were seldom sought, nor was their help enlisted in the education of their children. The teachers were seen as all-knowing and that was the accepted wisdom of the community.

The community supported the school mainly by attending the Christmas concert. Children did not have much choice in this matter either. All the parents would be coming to the school and all students had to have a part in a skit, or song or recitation. There was no debate. At times, the concert itself was arduous and time consuming. Often students did not want to participate but were expected to do so. The facilities left much to be desired with students waiting noisily in the wings or above the heads of the audience in classrooms for their turn to perform. Aside from this event there were no other fund-raisers. Fund-raising was unnecessary as there were few activities taking place outside of school and teachers did not need an extensive collection of instructional materials because the text was seen as the only necessary resource.

At that time, the grade eleven students had to write provincial exams at the end of the year. Although most of the classes were combination classes, we tried to get our senior class of two students alone at certain times. They were reliable enough to be left to work independently in the kitchen while we attended other classes. The school was so small that we could still supervise them and work with other students.

That first year was really traumatic for me because a great deal was required for which I had little preparation or background. I resorted to teaching the way I had been taught which meant that I focussed on the textbook as the only resource and I used lecturing as the primary instructional method. I did not feel comfortable having to be the controller, and I did not like having to get angry in order to have students do what I wanted, but I knew no other way of doing the job.

The experience of the first year helped out in the next year in the sense that I had some idea about the subject matter, I knew the students who sat in front of me each day, and I began to relax. Although my methods were basically the same, I started using more discussion with the class and provided time for all students to contribute. I started to see their many individual talents and needs, but still did not know how to handle them. The textbook still had to be finished regardless of students' ability to handle it. Passing and failing marks still meant everything. I did not enjoy embarrassing a student when I had to give a low mark, but there were no thoughts of building that student's self-esteem.

By the third year I began to feel that what I was doing was ridiculous. I made a decision to use the same text with the whole group in several of my subjects. Also, I decided, with the approval of the program co-ordinator at district office, to flip-flop the curriculum, thus teaching a grade nine social studies course to all of the grade eight and nine students one year and the grade eight course the next year. I used the same process for the religion course and any others I was teaching. I taught the language course at the next level while another teacher taught math and science in my class. This minor change cut the workload in half and allowed me to work with the whole class on a course.

The next year, one of the teachers from the elementary section moved on. I was reassigned to a grade six single grade class with another male teacher taking over my duties at the higher level. This seemed the way it was supposed to be—one teacher for one grade. It certainly was what I knew from my own schooling. I had to get to know the material again, and because I had a slight background in French, was able to begin a

French program in the school. I clearly remember calling out numbers which we had learned in French class. I had a certain pace in mind and thought that the students had to be able to write the numerals as quickly as I was calling them. They were saying, "Miss, you are going too fast!", but I would forge on ahead feeling that this was the way it should be done. Things were totally teacher-led with little regard for students' needs and abilities. It was as though I was aiming to teach only those students who could handle what I was teaching and was ignoring the needs of those who were unchallenged or unable to keep pace.

That year I did introduce more hands-on activities. I tried using drama in the class to get the students more interested in their reading and writing, and conducted as many science experiments as possible. However, the class remained teacher-directed and textbook-oriented with limited amounts of student-to-student or student-teacher interaction. I still did not feel good about myself as a teacher. I felt as if I were accomplishing very little. There were several boys in the class who were difficult to handle, and I was really perplexed as to what to do with them. They appeared disinterested, but I still had a textbook to cover so appealing to their interests was not an option. I was beginning to gain some experience but I still needed more training in sound methodology in order to become effective in the classroom.

At that time, I became pregnant with our first child. I taught until Easter of 1979 at which time I resigned, fully intending never to return to teaching again.

Four years passed quickly. My husband and I had our second child, built a house and learned lots from our children. We noticed the differences in our children's personalities, talents, and abilities. The older one listened to everything we said; the younger had a mind of her own. The older loved books, listened and understood what we were reading. The younger never seemed to listen, but always seemed to know what was happening. Their personalities and ways of behaving were completely different. They accomplished such things as walking and talking at different times, but they still managed to play together and learn from each other. I began to wonder how they would make out in school. I knew how I would like for them to be taught which caused me to wonder how I would do things differently if I were to return to the classroom. Parenting had put a different slant on things. It was a major turning point in my career. I knew I wanted to teach again, but I also knew things would have to be different.

I wanted to be the type of teacher who could reach all of the students in the class at their level although at that time I knew nothing about developmentally appropriate practice. I wanted them to enjoy their time in school and get all they could out of it. I wanted students to be able to work together and cooperate. I wanted to enjoy my time in school and learn new things myself. I wanted our class to be a special place. I wanted to know how to do all of those things.

I placed my name on the substitute teacher list at a time when substitute days were readily available. Time went quickly and pleasantly. There were very few difficult situations and, as a substitute teacher, I generally followed the way the teacher wanted

things done. I had the opportunity to observe teaching and learning in all grades and noticed that not much had changed—the routines remained teacher-directed and textbook-oriented with lots of worksheets and homework.

The next year I was lucky enough to get a job at the school in which I first taught. I was assigned to teach a grade five class and also had duties in French in grades four and six providing I agreed to upgrade my qualifications towards an education degree. This was something I knew I had to do and wanted to do. It was just the beginning of numerous summers away from home, enrolment in correspondence and distance courses, and participation in many professional development activities. My philosophy had begun to change. I had started to question my practices and now had a chance to find the answers to quite a few questions which had been bothering me for a long time. There had to be a different way to teach from the way I had been teaching. There had to be some way to get students' attention and keep them interested. There had to be some way to provide appropriate learning opportunities for everyone.

I returned to teaching in the fall of 1983 and I have to say that I enjoyed that year of teaching. I still used many of the traditional methods of teaching, but I started interacting more with the students. I started adjusting my expectations for some of the students who could not read and write well. I started to realize that because they were in grade five, it did not necessarily mean that they had all the skills expected of a grade five student. Diversity existed in the single grade class.

I began to realize this vast difference in ability and development existed because I came to know the students so well. I knew they were working to their potential mainly through my contact with them over the years. They were the friends of my children whose developmental levels I understood quite well. I started working with the students from where they were and provided opportunities for them to make progress. I started using more resources from wherever I could find them. I encouraged the children to use more illustrations and did not emphasize pen and paper tests as much. I also encouraged students to accept that making a mistake is a learning experience and that every word they spelled did not have to be right the first time. I tried to have fun with the children, rearranged the seats, and let them work and talk together.

Most of the changes I made resulted from my thinking about the way I would like to teach my own two children. There was little in the way of educational literature available in our school, but the coordinators of our school district had begun one day in-service sessions for French, science and social studies. Listening to other teachers in the district explain how they organized their classes and presented various activities stimulated me to make my teaching style more interesting.

The Journey Continues Over a Road Under Construction

There was only one problem. My husband, who had been principal and a supporter of innovative teaching, moved to another school. His replacement had little

experience and held extremely traditional views about teaching and learning. He thought that if there was noise in a class, there were problems. Students were to sit in their seats quietly, listen to the teacher, and complete their work. Teachers were to maintain control. Our philosophies did not blend well. He was not one to show leadership or to work with teachers. His method of dealing with a "wayward" teacher was to report the teacher to the school board and ask for the superintendent to come out and see for himself. Teachers were evaluated through classroom observation under somewhat contrived circumstances. It was a very stressful year. I was trying to make some changes in my practice, but I had little support.

I wanted my classroom to be a place where students felt comfortable and had a degree of mobility. But I really did not know how to go about doing this. I probably attempted it in big chunks rather than in small, well thought out steps. Consequently, if it got noisy or looked chaotic, I would panic and my voice would get louder. I was too much of a traditionalist to sit back and let the students find their way, but I didn't know enough about how to set up the type of classroom I wanted to make it run smoothly. Letting go of control in the classroom was probably one of the most difficult things for me to do. When my principal heard the noise or saw the movement without direction, he didn't understand it and considered it to be a discipline problem in the class. This made making changes in the classroom more difficult and forced most teachers to maintain the status quo rather than take a risk at implementing any new ideas.

Several good things did occur that year, however. The superintendent of our district sat in on several of my classes and told me that they were the most interesting and energetic classes he had seen for some time. My students were enthusiastic and quite good to work with, both individually and in groups. I learned to lower my voice and found it much more effective in managing the class than using a loud voice. This solved at least one problem for the remainder of the year.

By this time, there were several changes in our elementary school. We had been provided with some specialist services including a special needs teacher. The special needs students were identified by the classroom teacher, assessed by the special needs teacher, and assigned a time to go to that person's class for individual and group work. There was some consultation between classroom and special needs teacher which occurred mainly around reporting time. Our school also gained the services of a physical education teacher although students had to be bussed to the next community in order to avail of the service. There was an after school sports program in floor hockey and ping pong. These changes were very beneficial to students.

Our promotion policy as outlined by the school board was less beneficial. At the end of the year, the classroom teacher would sit down with the principal and maybe the special needs teacher to decide the fate of students who had been experiencing difficulty. We would question whether or not the student was at grade level and determine at which grade level that student might be working. We would discuss the student's effort and attitudes and, finally, ask if the student could handle the work of the next grade level. We

did not use authentic assessment tools, such as portfolios, as a means of determining students' progress and accomplishments. Those decisions were made primarily on the basis of the marks that students obtained on pen and paper tests. Many students who were in a special education class wrote the tests without modification and frequently did not receive a passing grade of 50%. After some discussion we would assign a PWD—pass without a diploma. This meant that the child was achieving as well as could be expected, but could not handle the curriculum or the textbooks provided. No modifications were made to the child's program but, the student was permitted to move to the next grade. Some students did get an F on their final reports and were required to repeat the grade. I had grave doubts about this practice. If a child could not handle the program one year, that child would be unlikely to benefit from repeating the same subjects the next year, especially when adjustments very likely would not be made. There were missing elements here that were not being considered, and I accepted them without much objection.

By the 1980s, "whole language" became the buzz words of the day. None of us at the school knew what that meant. We had been using basal readers in English language arts, and taught spelling, language, reading and writing separately. The new "whole language"concept was finally introduced to us in a one day in-service at the board office. The main points of that in-service seemed to us to be that spellers were not to be used any more and that there would be no more workbooks to go along with the basal reading program. We checked with the <u>Program of Studies</u> from the Department of Education to

see how much time we were supposed to use for language and filled that in our timetables. We stopped using the spellers and really did not know what other methods to employ in their place. We started DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) every morning for the whole school. We began making minor adjustments, but our training had been so inadequate that most teachers found old spellers to use and workbooks to photocopy and proceeded to teach as they had taught before. The philosophy of language arts instruction may have changed at the Department of Education or the board office, but the classroom practice quite often remained the same.

I really started trying to integrate the various strands of my language instruction. I had observed some of the work our new special needs teacher was doing with groups of mixed-age students and it appeared interesting, not only to me, but also to the students. She was using trade books for her activities. She brought in other resources to use with her stories and had related activities. What she was doing made sense. We started chatting and she began to help me out with some of my work. It was really my first attempt at using themes. Still, there were gaps everywhere that I just couldn't figure out. I did not know what to do with themes, how to determine what students should and did accomplish, and how to choose appropriate trade books for students. The questions were numerous and the answers elusive. It was a step in the right direction, but much more understanding of whole language instruction was needed before appropriate changes to instruction could be made.

In the mean time, I had been doing courses to complete my degree in teaching. The more courses I did, the more confidence I had in my abilities as a teacher. When I first started teaching, I really did not think that I was as good a teacher as many others in bigger schools. I thought that I did not know the material well and that was why many of our students hadn't accomplished much. I was really nervous about going to in-service sessions, especially those related to French, because I thought I would look really dumb and unprepared. I was reluctant about being active in the Newfoundland Teacher's Association because I believed that I was inferior to the other teachers. The more courses I did, the further removed I became from these thoughts and the closer I came to thinking, "If I don't get out there and see what is going on, I'll never be a better teacher. I'll never change. I have to rely on myself to find out the things I need to know."

I began to take advantage of numerous professional development activities that were pertinent to my teaching. As new programs were introduced, in-service training sessions became more plentiful. I attended a month long French institute where "les murs ont les oreilles"(the walls have ears), and we were told to speak only French for the entire month. I followed this up with summer school courses the next year. There were numerous French workshops since we had a district program coordinator who was quite interested in raising the proficiency of the elementary teachers. There was a three-day in-service session which boosted everyone's confidence, allowed us to get to know one another, and to see that our dilemmas were similar. This was followed up in later years by a trip to Saint Pierre that helped our French immensely by immersing us in a French milieu.

One summer school included an art course where I learned activities which I still use in the classroom. It was one of the most practical hands-on courses that I had ever done. I used many of the ideas over the next several years as I alternated between single-grade subject teaching and multi-grade classes in the elementary grades.

I took a term of paid leave after doing several courses through correspondence and attended Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in 1985 to complete my degree. It was there that my writing skills improved and I became quite interested in Canadian authors and old English. Still, there were no courses in educational methodology. The whole term was quite challenging as my two children, who had come from a school of sixty children, were attending a large school of six hundred children in the city. It was quite an adjustment for all of us.

Other in-service sessions about a variety of educational matters followed. A Global Education session, which lasted for a full week, sparked an interest in world problems and provided activities which could be used with the whole class and even the whole school. An Eloquent Librarian course introduced us to technology and the library. The library technology course proved not to be practical because there were no plans to automate our school library.

In 1991, teachers from another school came to visit our school to do a presentation on resource-based learning (RBL). I found this very helpful, but I thought I needed to learn how these methods would apply to multi-grade situations which applied to some classes in our school in order for it to be completely useful to my situation. I hadn't realized how useful these methods could have been.

Another principal appeared on the scene in 1991, when our principal of the last seven years moved to another school. The new principal had teaching experience in the high school but no administrative experience. She started a process of "School Improvement" and, because none of us knew what was involved, we felt somewhat threatened by the term itself. It was as if we had not been doing a good job, or at least that's how some of the teachers took it. Computers were introduced to the school and we began having our library automated by volunteers. This principal continued with the parent-teacher organization and revisited many of the school policies. While her methods were traditional and she believed in control, she also encouraged teachers on our staff to discuss teaching practices, particularly at lunch time. It was an opportunity to have some informal professional development.

During this principal's tenure, I took on the job of acting principal during a time when she was on sick leave. When she resigned to move on to a job in another community she encouraged me to apply for the principalship. My application was accepted and in 1993, I began my job as an administrator of a small, rural kindergarten to grade six school with no formal administrative training or preparation and with only my stint as an acting principal to carry me through. The next five years proved to be the most thought provoking of my career.

The Next Stage of the Journey: Giving Directions to Others

While filling the role of acting principal, my biggest concern had been making it through the day and ringing the bell. I had really taken on the role of the manager and

paper pusher which was not how I now envisaged my role as principal. Instead, I felt that I could garner support from parents to undertake new projects. I knew, also, that I could work with the staff to set a direction. I understood that we lacked resources and I knew what was needed. Finally, and most important, I knew our students' strengths and needs so well that I felt strongly that, as principal, I would be able to use both human and material resources to help our students grow.

Early in the fall of 1993, everyone got a great kick out of calling me "Boss." While a title may not appear very significant, I felt it signified how others saw my role; that is, as the person who tells everyone else what to do. That is not how I viewed the principalship. I did not believe that I should make all the decisions or shoulder all the responsibility. I believed that we had to work as a team or our small school would not function smoothly. Any concerns I had about instructional philosophies and practices needed to form part of the larger picture of concerns that should be developed by the school team. The challenge for me was to work out how the role of principal as manager and instructional leader could fit with my teaching responsibilities and with my belief that children should be at the center of all planning.

That is how the year began. The four teachers on staff had to be a part of the planning and the decision making or nothing would change. Therefore, I took measures to ensure that the staff members were well-informed and that their opinions were valued. Parents also were kept informed and encouraged to visit the school on a regular basis. We wanted the school to become approachable and friendly.

Our staff worked well at identifying problem areas and trying to find solutions. We had noticed that the children's reading levels were not where they should be. We had wondered about our classroom practices, but only one teacher was using novel studies with some success while the others continued using basal readers. We all put more emphasis on taking books home to read at night and spent a large portion of our instructional budget on new reading materials directed at early readers. We also started some buddy reading where the older students read for fifteen minutes with the younger children. Our older students were trained as peer tutors. We continued with our DEAR program. We used daily journal writing as part of our program, but were finding the writing repetitive and without focus for most of the children. We had recognized a problem and made several attempts to fix it without much success.

Several school principals had mentioned using an Accelerated Reader program where students read books and answered questions on the computer in order to gain points and get rewards. It was a motivational reading program which we thought might be what we needed to get the students reading more. We applied to Human Resources Development Corporation and received enough money to set up four schools in our area with site licences and start them off with computer disks and a set of books for each site. This really worked well with our kindergarten to grade six students. They earned enough points for a pizza party and individual prizes as well. We tried getting parents to put some of our own books on the computer disks. This really benefitted the slower readers in the special needs class as many of the books they read were not part of the AR program.

I felt good about my first year as principal. We had been part of a decision-making team. We had made some improvements in motivating children to read even if we did use a reward system. More parents were visiting the school and helping out with the Accelerated Reader program, and some fathers helped run the after school sports program. Teachers had been responsible for a portion of the budget from which they could choose their own resources, and even though we knew there were many other problem areas we could work on and improve, we all felt as though we were working together towards a common goal of improving student achievement. We had done the best that we could do in one year.

During the Easter holidays of 1993, the Department of Education held a meeting in Gander for the purpose of looking at student achievement. Our school had been asked to attend because of its poor achievement levels. I attended, along with the Superintendent and the coordinator who would be responsible for School Improvement for the district. The sessions proved interesting and they became the launching point for school improvement in our district. The superintendent made me feel quite good when he pointed out that he would not necessarily have chosen our school for closer scrutiny since he knew that we had taken on several initiatives and were working towards improving reading and writing skills. At that time, I had been asked by the Deputy Minister of Education what I would do to improve achievement in our school. I had answered by saying that we had numerous students with special needs and that a program geared to their needs which included life skills, may prove relevant. I was not articulate enough

then to say that the curriculum needed to become more child-centered, and that our multi-grade classes could be more effective if only we had appropriate training and support.

I still had many questions about my classroom practices. The students quite often read or listened to others reading from various subject area textbooks. There were still worksheets which required students to fill in the blanks and respond to a few questions requiring longer answers. I was aware that this worked for some but not for others. I wondered if there was a better way of doing things.

In our social studies text, the one chapter that we liked very much was "Grandparents' Days". During the years when there were two grades in my class, usually a four-five combination, we all did this together and the children helped plan a culminating activity. Students would write skits, learn songs, draw pictures to show activities for the days of the week, bring in old items to set up a museum, and invite guests to come into the school for the afternoon. The whole school would be present for this activity. Usually they would ask one of the local women to play the accordion before things started. I was the announcer for a couple of years. The program was planned so that there would be one play, one song, one jig and maybe a retired teacher who would tell a story about getting the cocoa malt ready for recess or some other favorite tale. Those who had brought in items for the museum would show their public speaking skills by telling everyone about the item—what it was, who owned it, and how old it was. Those who had done illustrations on the days of the week would explain the day, the chore and the meal prepared. The event was enjoyed by all. I realized that this was the

type of teaching that I preferred and the way that students liked to learn. Everyone worked together on the theme but on different levels and at different activities. There was something for everyone. This was not the norm, however, when it came to teaching practice. This was a once-a-year big event and then things reverted to the normal, traditional ways with students all reading the same material in the text, doing the same pencil and paper activities, and writing the same kinds of tests for evaluation purposes.

Social studies, particularly at the grade five level, was one of the easiest subjects for which to develop activities that could be tailored to all ages and interests. Although I still had not considered integrating the content here with my language arts activities, students showed more enthusiasm for social studies than for many other subjects because they could express their understanding of what they had learned in a number of ways. I still had not quite moved away from using worksheets to determine student progress, but I saw that this practice needed refinement. My ideas on evaluation were changing and I could see the benefit of letting students choose the way they wanted to represent their ways of knowing. I did not know how to incorporate my views into our graded system, particularly given the need to complete the curriculum and to report on progress as our district expected—with grades based primarily on pen and paper tests especially for grades four to six in our school. I became less concerned about this when I saw that students were actively involved in themes that really interested them.

Religious education was more difficult to make interesting, although I found that the use of story and involvement in activities did help students learn. I discovered that active involvement also maintained student interest in the other subject areas that I taught.

By this time, I was using a thematic approach in language arts. I would generally start with a theme which had connections to stories in the basal reader, mainly because we lacked suitable resources such as trade books. I tried to make up a vocabulary list to go along with the thematic unit. I had the students study several words per night from this list and then checked on their knowledge either orally or in written form. If students had books on the theme under study, they were invited to bring them along to class. The choice of theme, however, always came from me—what I thought the students would be interested in, what I had resources for, or what was in the basal reader that could be used. All students read or listened to the same stories and participated in the same activities. They kept journals, but the quality of their work showed that I had not given clear enough instructions on how to maintain a journal. The journal work needed revision. Other than that, the students seemed happy and enthusiastic for the most part. It should be noted here that the slower students in the class were being taken out by the special needs teacher for individual and group work. I felt that our school was doing what it was supposed to be doing.

At the end of that first year as principal, I began to consider another career move. We had four schools in the area—two elementary, one primary and one high school. The plan was to close all of these schools eventually and to open one all grade school. Administrative positions in the new school would require several years experience and a Master's degree in Education. It was time to consider whether I wanted to stay in the classroom or to aim toward an administrative position. The latter would require further

study. Because I had enjoyed working in an administrative capacity with teachers, exploring new ideas, and staying current with district and provincial directions, I knew I would have to start on a graduate program. On the very last day for applications, I applied to begin graduate level courses at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook that fall semester. It would mean a two-hour commute both ways, once a week after school which would get me home at about midnight. It would also mean juggling classroom work, administrative duties, graduate studies, and family responsibilities. I felt ready to take on the challenge.

Our school board of the time began a full scale School Improvement program during the fall of 1994. They realized that if student achievement was to improve, each school would be required to take a look at its strengths and areas of growth to see what could be changed or improved. The board office even formed its own team to facilitate improvement there. They applied for and got funding to offer seminars at the Killdevil Conference Center for school teams.

Our turn was early in May of 1995. All of our staff could attend because we were such a small staff. Some schools included parent representatives, but our team was not ready to have parents included as part of our training. Some teachers were apprehensive about the whole idea and did not know what it would entail. Some perceived it as more work, while others were willing to wait and see.

The sessions turned out to be quite productive and brought us together as a team. It increased our pride in our small school and helped us to see that we were on the right

track. We listed our strengths and areas of growth and decided to incorporate parents into our team as soon as possible. We arranged our areas of growth in order of priority, set goals for ourselves, and established time lines for accomplishing those goals.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teacher's Association School Administrator's Special Interest Council has kept my interest and support over the years. During its Gander conference of 1995, Jim Grant, an American educator and consultant, held the audience captive for a full day. His address on multi-age teaching was the first time that I had heard anyone talk about teaching in a way that filled in gaps in my thinking and brought things together for me. He spoke eloquently and entertained the whole group on topics from developmentally appropriate practices which he considers to be the compass which guides you through multi-age teaching, to looping, to ungraded, multi-age and combined classrooms. His approach was child-centered, and his advice to administrators sound. I immediately knew that this was what I was looking for.

At the same conference, I sat in on a presentation from two teachers from Lark Harbour, a small community on the west coast of Newfoundland, who spoke of their multi-age classrooms. They went through how they had introduced the program to the school, how they had approached parents, set up routines and enjoyed learning with children. They appeared to be so happy and confident in their approach that I knew I would be looking for more information from them.

Following the practical side of the multi-age approach, Dr. Dennis Mulcahy, professor in the Education Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland, gave a

presentation on the multi-grade situation in the province. The whole conference peaked my interest because finally I had found the approach for which I had been looking. Now it was matter of finding out more and educating my staff.

After the conference in Gander, I had a better understanding of the various approaches to teaching and learning. I had been educated myself in a very traditional style of teaching. The teacher was in charge and led all of the activities in a single-grade, single age classroom. My attempts over the years of teaching an assortment of single-grade, and multi-grade classrooms left me unhappy and dissatisfied. The multi-grade classrooms usually consisted of a combination of two grade levels where I generally used a traditional lecture style while juggling various grade level textbooks. I always felt that there was more potential there than I was harnessing and that students could do more on their own than I was allowing.

When Jim Grant spoke of having the same students for up to three years, and having them working on projects at their own level and becoming life-long learners, I finally knew where I was headed on my journey. I wanted to know more about this approach to teaching and learning and I finally had a name for it--multi-age continuous progress.

I met a person in my graduate course who had been using multi-age methods for years. We became friends and discussed this approach whenever we had the opportunity. She gave me articles to read on the topic and invited me into her classroom. I was beginning to realize that the approach I had been so long in finding had been around me

all the time. My friend's class was in Corner Brook. She had chosen this method, not out of necessity, but because that is how she thought children learned best. I had to find out more. I had read that the Pouch Cove Elementary School had implemented a multi-grade program there and had received funding to do research on the results of student achievement while using this approach. I was fortunate in receiving an extra day's leave while attending a School Administrator's Conference in St. John's in 1995 and was able to arrange a visit to the school. The principal of that time, had begun her teaching career in White Bay. We were old friends.

I had the opportunity to visit classes at the Pouch Cove School and talk to the teachers. The teachers were honest, open and quite willing to discuss the multi-age approach. They described how difficult it was to start teaching in this manner. They had not liked the prospect at first, but said that now they would not teach any other way. They had received valuable assistance from a school board coordinator who spent time with them while they set up the program. Their approach involved using the curriculum goals and objectives as laid down by the Department of Education and the required texts to develop themes that would be rotated over a three year period. This would mean that all of the goals and objectives would be covered but the themes would not be repeated over the three years. Their implementation plan had been well thought out and presented to parents in an organized fashion. The visit to this school was informative and showed one method of setting up this approach. I saw multi-age teaching from a different perspective there.

I started leaving books and articles around the staff room on the subject of multi-age teaching. I had hoped the staff would like Chase and Doan's Full Circle, Ostrow's A Room with a Different View or Bingham's Exploring the Multiage Classroom. I would start up conversations about the topic, but most teachers were not interested. I tried to move slowly, but I think I get over enthusiastic about some things. I was worried about presenting my views too aggressively. I ordered books for the school on the topic, read them myself, and then mentioned certain ideas from my reading to other teachers on my staff. One of the teachers was my walking partner. She was also my sounding board. We would discuss our work at school and these new ideas I was reading about. She was supportive but always came up with good questions like how to handle Special Needs students in the class, or how to integrate the curriculum or how to come up with open ended questions and projects that would suit every student's abilities. She was nervous about giving up some of the control in the classroom and wondered how to handle discipline. She kept me grounded. Our discussions provided ideas that helped her reflect on her own practice.

Still, the teachers on staff were reluctant, and I could understand their hesitancy. Their long-standing resentment of all the work associated with teaching two grade-levels with separate texts for each grade-level in the same room had been reawakened. They equated the multi-age concept to which I had been referring as one in the same. All they heard was several grade-levels in the same room and turned off the remainder of the conversation concerning celebrating diversity or using developmentally appropriate

practice with a variety of resources. We had been working under trying circumstances over the past few years and teachers felt bombarded with new initiatives and felt a lack of support or recognition for their hard work. It would be hard to sell, but I would keep trying.

I started looking for curriculum projects which could be used for students of various levels of development. One such project which proved to be of great value was Enterprise Education. Volunteers were being called by the Department of Education to become part of the project. By this time, I had made it known to coordinators that I thought teachers in small schools had just as much to offer as teachers in larger schools—quite a contrast to the way I had viewed myself and my abilities earlier in my career. I added, as well, that when a curriculum was being designed, rural areas should be taken into consideration. Our district office sent two names of interested teachers to the Enterprise Education project—one from a large school and the other from our small school. The curriculum designer decided that he wanted a broad representation in his program and chose to have me as part of the team. It proved to be a wonderful experience, meeting other teachers in St. John's and thinking of projects which could be used as part of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation curriculum. The project I chose integrated a walking tour our class had conducted for Social Studies with finding primary documents at the church, school and town hall, and conducting interviews with seniors and business owners in order to develop a time line of the history of our town. It turned out to be a project that the students really enjoyed. They presented the time line to

the town hall and the mayor passed an ordinance saying that the time line would be a part of the town hall forever. This project became part of the Pathways to Enterprise Program and we suggested modifications to other activities which would be more appropriate to rural areas. I knew it was this type of project that interested students and that suited my style of teaching. I had gathered most of the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle over the years, but I still needed to see the top of the box to be able to put together the whole picture.

In the fall of 1995, I returned to university to continue my graduate studies. While attending university, I learned about the leadership skills needed to effect change. These skills come, not only from the principal, but also from classroom teachers. I learned about effective school policy and about qualitative study. That is where my interest in action research as a possibility for the classroom and my thesis started. I knew I would have to do something on multi-age teaching and my classroom. The only obstacle was that I would be returning to my class in January and would loose the momentum built up in this term.

Upon returning to school, I started applying for funding for a retreat for our school improvement team along with two other schools in the area who were writing mission statements, setting goals and priorities, and developing action plans. In June of 1996, we met quite successfully with a facilitator from the school board and parents. One of the teachers from Harbour Deep, an isolated community on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, had attended a multi-age in-service for a week the summer before. She had initiated a multi-age program for primary in her school and shared her ideas with us.

She explained how she used a series of themes, some of which she chose, others of interest to her students, to integrate her curriculum and cover the goals and objectives as laid out by the Department of Education of our province. She explained how she would find as many resources as possible including basal readers and textbooks to complete research projects at the primary level. She had given us a starting point to consider. We all felt a sense of accomplishment when the sessions ended.

One of the main goals resulting from our retreat was to devise a discipline policy. We had noticed that many of our problems were found in the primary section of our school. We had tried a token economy, time out, and had consulted a behavioral psychologist because of the disruptive behavior of several of our students. The parents were actively involved in the development of the policy which put in place a set of expectations, actions, consequences, and rewards. We were pleased with the policy as it had taken just about a year to design. At that time we had not realized there could be a relationship between student behavior and the approaches used in a multi-age classroom. We had not realized that if children became engaged in work which was associated with their interests, talents, and developmental levels, they would probably become less disruptive. This process was a learning experience for us.

Another goal had been to investigate the multi-age approach to teaching. The staff had heard me talk about it and felt that they needed more information in order to decide if it was something they would consider implementing. At this time, I was looking for ways of using our human resources differently and delivering the curriculum in a

different manner and had hoped that the multi-age approach would provide some solutions to our problems. I thought that if our teachers collaborated more with planning, shared their expertise and grouped students flexibly in our primary section, we would see better results and work in a more relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. Most of the staff had previous experience with multi-grading and were skeptical about the approach. They realized that the better they knew their students, the easier the planning was for them. But, they had been so used to grade level distinctions and textbook teaching that they really didn't know how they would integrate subjects. They didn't know how they would have students doing different things at the same time. They were also very concerned about how Special Needs students would keep up and how you would report much of this information to parents. They didn't know where they would begin with such an approach especially letting student interest and choice be predominant in the class rather than having everything teacher-directed. They were afraid of the thought of letting go of control in the class in view of some of the problems with behavior we had experienced in the primary section in the last few years. The change required to adopt this philosophy would take an investment of time, leadership, and training for our teachers before they could collaborate and work as a team to develop such an approach.

From my research of the literature on the multi-age approach to teaching, I was aware of its many characteristics. I knew that it was not what most teachers feared from their early experience with multi-grade teaching where students of different grade levels were put together in the same class because their numbers were so small, that there were

not enough teachers to make each class a single-grade structure. I understood that it was not the case where teachers were required to teach the textbooks for all of the courses for whichever grades they were assigned. I saw that it was not a matter of paper and pencil testing at the end of each chapter with marks assigned for formal reporting to parents. I felt that although initially it would mean extra work for teachers, that it would not mean the extra load that these teachers were worried it would be.

What I did find was a description of an approach to teaching which emphasized a flexible, developmentally appropriate curriculum used by a heterogeneous community of learners. A concern for holistic learning where activities are planned which are conducive to active student involvement became evident. Skills applied in real-life situations, both in the school and the community, enrich the curriculum. The teacher becomes the facilitator allowing mobility, choice and student interaction in the classroom. The emphasis is on the process of learning rather than content through the use of an integrated curriculum. Continuous progress and authentic assessment are used to evaluate students over several years. The continuity in the classroom, having students with the same teacher for up to three years, is valuable, as well as the celebration of diversity. Having such a child-centered approach where everyone is a teacher and a learner was the type of approach I had been looking for. I hoped to lead our staff to the same conclusions.

District coordinators were contacted and they agreed to help us research this approach. We did not get very far, however, as the coordinators' positions were

eliminated by the government within weeks of our discussion. We did manage to do enough research to inform parents sufficiently to have them agree to letting us set up an elementary—grades four, five, and six—multi-age class for September of 1996. The presentation was basically a brief overview of the approach and an informal chat with parents as to what we would attempt to do. We were fortunate to have been working with a group of parents for several years who were willing to trust us enough to try to work with students in this different arrangement. The special needs teacher and I team taught. We planned our curriculum approach together as best we could. We used a thematic approach integrating various subjects and planning a selection of activities from which students could choose. But it soon became evident that we understood the philosophy but lacked the details for the implementation of such a practice.

The year proved interesting. We enlisted the help of the students in making up our list of class rules. Students signed up for group tasks and, together, we went over the schedule for the day each morning. We taught in themes starting with a Communications theme at the beginning of the year. We tried to integrate the curriculum as best we knew how. Our reading and writing activities were related to the theme, and we finally saw good journal writing as they wrote about their activities and told us what they had learned. We used a center format for a unit on the computers. My colleague would work on some writing activities with one heterogeneous group of students while I took a group to another location for a series of videos and hands-on activities on the Intel processor. Eventually the technology person who networked and repaired our computers helped us

take a hard-drive apart and point out the various parts we had studied. We tried to apply our skills to real-life situations.

We did group research projects and presentations to the class. We had numerous activities to be done during the day, and students signed up to do the activities at different times. We used drama whenever suitable and introduced some improvisation. The Special Needs teacher taught the math in her own room both in groups of 4-5-6 and separate grades. She found it difficult to cover the material as she was using the grade level texts rather than integrating by topic. We knew we should be using more manipulative and trying discovery math where students were given activities which allowed them to discover concepts for themselves. But we would need some advice in that area. We worked in the same room for most activities and moved from group to group checking on the writing process, conducting mini-lessons, and working with individual children. We allowed students to choose their own group in some cases and chose groups for instruction of specific topics as the need arose.

The volume of students' voices as they worked bothered us at times and we found it difficult to let go of the control we were used to and let students take responsibility for their own work and behavior. The lack of knowledge on our part as to how to implement the multi-age approach was evident here as we had not taken the students step by step through the details of forming and getting into groups and the level of noise that was acceptable in the class. We sometimes assumed that students knew how we wanted things done without actually modelling and practicing the procedures.

There were times when we knew that this new approach was working and there were times when we knew it was not. When it was working, we could look around and see everyone actively engaged in some activity. They were noisy, but busy and engrossed in what they were doing. When we thought it wasn't working we would change up the activities quickly. We still used texts because other resources were often limited. Incorporating the use of computers in the classroom and having students working on different things at different times took some getting used to. We did not know exactly what we were doing, but we kept assessing and discussing on a daily basis and recording our thoughts on students' work habits, strengths, and weaknesses in order to plan what we needed to do individually in small group or with the whole class. In the end, we felt we had made progress but we would have benefitted from observing another class in action—seeing how that class was organized and what resource material was available to be used by the students. We realized we had not individualized the program to the extent that was really needed.

There were students whom we thought did not achieve much in the class. We found one boy who appeared lost. He eavesdropped and worked with others but the amount that he contributed was limited. We would have to assess how better to meet this boy's needs. If having him in the class just doing what the others were doing, illustrating stories and telling us his interpretation was enough, we had accomplished that. When it comes to students with special needs, however, we would need to know what is expected of them. We still talk about that year and how we would have done things differently.

After some reflection, we realized that in order to begin implementing this approach, we probably could have started with procedural lessons allowing the classroom to function as a multi-age classroom. We should have spent more time at the beginning of the year teaching students the routine for the classroom and how to make choices. They needed practice in getting into groups, choosing books, finding a place and a partner if necessary for reading. We could have showed students where everything was such as art supplies, paper, staplers, and had them practice accessing and using the materials as well as cleaning up after themselves. We definitely needed more help with individualizing programs as our Special Needs boy showed us. Although many points needed clarification, I believe the only way to become accustomed to this approach is to attempt it and learn as you go.

In the spring of 1997, an encounter our staff had with the primary coordinator and a multi-age teacher turned out a little differently than I had anticipated. The primary coordinator knew of my interest in multi-age teaching and had consented to come out to discuss the concept with the staff. She arranged to bring a teacher with her who used these methods and who would be able to respond to questions the staff would have. They arrived in the afternoon to meet the three teachers and two parents who were part of our School Improvement team. I had asked that the session not be too long so that teachers could absorb the information and get their thoughts together. They showed a film of a classroom using multi-age methods. It looked busy and interesting and the teachers enjoyed that. We had a great discussion with a question and answer time. The teachers

did not make much comment and only one asked relevant questions. She knew what sort of questions to ask because she and I had been team teaching the grades 4-5-6 class which I have already mentioned.

I let my staff have some time together and then went out to gauge their feelings. All of their insecurities came out. They felt as if this idea was being pushed at them, that what they had been doing for so long had not been good enough, that they weren't trained for this approach, and that they did not want to change the way they were doing things. They insisted that this was just another way for the government to cut back more teachers and increase the workload. They reminded me of one of the comments the multi-age teacher had made when asked what was bad about multi-age teaching. Her reply had been that there wasn't anything. They just couldn't believe it. I told them that I understood how they felt and that it was not unusual to have these fears. With little other comment, I left it at that and thought I would have to wait awhile before discussing that topic again.

That same year, 1996-97, saw our school board, Deer Lake-St. Barbe South Integrated being consolidated with the Corner Brook School Boards. We had gone from being a small, close-knit school board where we knew everyone at district office and most of the teaching staff, to one which was large and had a teaching staff of six hundred. In addition, the school board decided that some small schools would have to be closed--ours being one of them along with the Pentecostal Primary school in the next community. With only forty-two students and a staff of four, their suggestion was to bus our students

to the next community which had a student population of about fifty and assign a teaching staff of five. One argument which the board administrators used to justify their decision was that it would mean fewer multi-grade classes and a better program for students. They knew that was what parents wanted to hear as many of those parents had attended a multi-grade classes using separate grade instruction in the same class. There was no attempt on the part of the district to explain any differences in philosophy or strategies between multi-age and multi-grade approaches although I personally supported the multi-age concept. Without proper training and support, it was my view that a multi-age approach for the entire school could not work if it was to be implemented within months of the announcement. Proper implementation could take between one and three years or longer.

It is difficult to describe how the whole community reacted to this announcement. There was such an outpouring of emotions from the staff, the parents, and the children, that it was unbelievable. Parents actually came into the staff room, sat down and cried. I could barely discuss the matter without crying myself. The last couple of years had seen parents coming into the school to help in the classroom, look after the Accelerated Reader program, start a pre-school program, run a Fall Fair, photocopy materials, be a part of the School Improvement Team, help in the library, prepare school luncheons, assist on field trips and so many other activities. They finally felt as if the school was theirs. Then the wind was taken out of their sails.

There were meetings in which parents got angry. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) tried to maintain a degree of decorum. They did not want to insult

the other school and insist that ours stay open, as the parents had been working with them over the years on committees to obtain a new facility for the whole area. Yet no one wanted to see our school close. The PTO suggested maintaining the status quo until the new school was built, but the school board countered saying that we would be assigned two and one half units for our six grades if the schools remained open. With their present level of training and knowledge about multi-age teaching, trying to implement that program would have been impossible. The decision was passed by the board, and our school would close.

Our school team decided to have a closing celebration of everything the school represented to all those in the community. We made it a theme project, wrote a song, found lists and pictures of students and teachers, asked people to send in photos they had, drew a mural of the community, brought food, and had a cake. No voices would be heard except those of the children. We showed old video tapes, talked with all those who came, and reminisced. We had a tremendous turnout and we were quite proud of the manner in which the children conducted themselves. Parents were resigned to the fact that the children would go to the next community. Some parents still opposed the idea saying that our school was in better shape and should remain open, but those people were in the minority. The parents helped pack everything in preparation for closing the school.

However, our school closure was reversed. Because due notice had not been served to the community concerning the closure of the school, the mayor, after conducting his own referendum on education, petitioned the school board on behalf of the

entire community to have the school reopened. Although it was not in the board's plans, they knew they would lose a court battle and voted to reopen the school as a kindergarten to grade four school adhering strictly to the formula for assigning teachers which would mean we would have two teachers for five grades. The grades five and six students would go to the central high school as would the students from the other elementary school. That school would be assigned four teachers to do the same job as the two of us were assigned to do. It would prove to be an interesting year with one class of kindergarten to grade two and another class of grades three and four. There was no support in place to help us as there would be no special needs teacher and we would take on the physical education program ourselves. Despite the difficulties, we remained optimistic that we could do the job.

I was called back to work a week early. We had two hundred and fifty boxes to unpack and get the classrooms set up again. It was a very difficult situation in which to find one's self. Half of the staff was gone. The parents who had thought it better to send their children to the next community for the sake of the program were also the ones who worked so diligently at the school. They were really upset at this turn of events and just stayed away from the school. It was just like working in a morgue the first few days the school opened.

Very early in the year, the two staff members arranged to visit two multi-age classes in Corner Brook. We were hoping to see how such strategies as readers' and writers' workshop operated and also to see a science and perhaps a math class if the

timing was right. The morning was well spent. We observed students sitting in a circle and working on the date, suggesting as many mathematical combinations as they could for that number. From that, a student had prepared an overhead with a math problem for the students to solve. Another student volunteered to prepare the overhead for the next morning. That was followed by a student telling the name of the book from which she had prepared a passage, explaining why she had chosen that book, reading aloud and answering questions about it. This flowed into the theme of Habitats on which the class had been working. It was a grade two/three class that had explored habitats outside, brought in materials to set up habitats in the classroom, and had done extensive research using books in the class. The activity had one group daily filling in a matrix on big sheets of paper on the chalkboard to show what they had learned about their habitat. From that, the teacher led a whole class discussion of place value. The students were requested to go get the materials they needed, find their groups, and choose a number using paper logs, flats and cubes to represent the number. The teacher circulated to see how everyone was doing. All ran smoothly.

The afternoon was spent in another school where we saw a mini Science Olympics. Activity sheets were given out and materials supplied for students to work at their own rate and level of ability to see what they could discover. The teacher and helper circulated to help where necessary. Exploration time came at the last part of the day. Letter and word Bingo, painting, blocks, and a dress up trunk were just some of the activities available. I liked the way the teacher had the students line up in alphabetical

order of last name and each day beginning with the next letter. It was fair to all. Seeing these activities first hand made incorporating them into our own classrooms so much easier.

Our new school district closed out all of the primary/elementary schools for two days in October, 1997 to hold a conference for the purpose of professional development. There were one and two-hour sessions as well as morning and full day seminars on an assortment of topics of interest to teachers and administrators from kindergarten to grade six. Several sections of the conference included multi-age topics, both philosophical and practical, and instructional strategies such as readers' and writers' workshop.. Another teacher and I did a presentation on our experience with multi-age teaching. I used a point form chronology highlighting which events had aided my decision to change to a multi-age approach to teaching which complemented the other ladies' account of setting up her multi-age class that previous year. It was interesting to notice, even in the small group which showed up at our session, where the participants were situated on the continuum of thinking about multi-age teaching. Most of the teachers were at different stages of the journey.

The continuum of change from traditional, single-grade teaching to multi-age continuous progress teaching is just like a time line. The far left represents a belief in the graded structure and little knowledge about multi-age continuous progress. A little further to the right represents some knowledge about a child-centered philosophy. Still further to the right on the time line is greater acceptance of student diversity, choice, and

responsibility. As teachers start to reflect on their own practices and consider how multi-age approaches might be incorporated into their classrooms, their position on the continuum is even further to the right. Movement along the continuum of change procedes as teachers start looking for and reading articles on multi-age teaching, talk to other teachers and visit their classrooms, and begin to implement multi-age methodologies. As teachers continue reflecting, refining, reading, discussing and team teaching, they find the approach that suits them and become comfortable with multi-age practices. Then they realize that the continuum leads to infinity as the possibilities are endless and competence as a multi-age practitioner improves.

Charting a New Course: Using the Multi-Age Approach in My Classroom

Following the district conference, I tried out some of the strategies I had seen and some I had read about in my search for information on multi-age teaching. I tried to set up the class so that there were different centers for writing materials, math materials, art supplies, and other materials. I worked with the students to organize the classroom. I brought several tables and chairs into the room. I set up a computer center of three computers. I had a carpet area near a chalkboard to make it comfortable for Circle Time. We worked together to set up a list of class rules. I chose the first theme on Knights and Castles. I had ordered numerous books at various levels, had acquired a computer game which could not be used because we didn't have Windows '95, put together a cardboard castle, tried to set up open-ended activities, and allowed time for reading and exploration time. There were books everywhere and we displayed the students' work all around the

class.

Because there were only thirty children in the whole school, I was hoping we could have a relaxed atmosphere. I did not use the bell and made sure the students knew how to tell time and checked the clock to see when things would happen. I tried to set up some classroom routines by having them use the bathroom and start Circle time by 8:30 a.m. Circle time allowed students to bring in any news from home or outside the school and this flowed naturally into school time. We would do the date activities, but only managed to complete a couple of overheads for math. Quite often the students would come back saying that their parents did not want to see the overheads sent home any more because it was too messy. We usually started with language arts, reading stories, illustrating and writing, and would proceed with math after recess. Because I had never taught math before, this was quite a challenge for me. I allowed computer time with Math games for one group and worked on concepts with another. I tried as much as possible to use math manipulative and let the students figure out the concepts themselves after mini lessons and whole class instruction. As time progressed, I did the same topics with both groups and just extended the ideas for those who were ready for it.

Another time we did a unit on Nain, a small community in Labrador. Into that we integrated snowmobile safety, First Aid and ice safety. Students made play dough snowmobiles, villages and caribou. They wrote stories using the writing process, and many painted pictures of Northern Lights when I had showed them a painting I had purchased because of my own interest.

One of the units the students chose to do was Boats. They had a keen interest in the Titanic, and with the interest being aroused by the movie coming out later, they read whatever books I could find on the topic, painted five foot boats, went on to research topics on whales, oceans, and fish. They drew long liners, wrote about their fathers' jobs, and told of times when they went fishing. Those were the highlights of the year.

My lack of expertise in meeting individual needs showed with this class. I was able to use authentic assessment in that I kept comprehensive notes and records of what the students had achieved. And I incorporated students' interests into the types of activities in which we participated during class time. I did spend quite a bit of time with students individually in the afternoon discussing their writing, spelling and math while others worked on computer, or participated in other activities during the Choices section of the day. Students could choose from reading, painting, and assortment of games, block construction, or clay modelling. However, I was just beginning to use flexible grouping for math or novels, etc. and quite often left students to respond to most of their reading by painting or modeling clay. I was not used to a workshop approach to reading and writing. I had not heard of the ten to fifteen minute mini-lesson followed by a Status-of-the-Class report which led to reading or writing while the teacher worked with individuals or small groups. The culmination to the workshop was a sharing session for the entire class. I realize now that I did not encourage enough research at each child's individual level in part because our resources were limited and in part because I was unsure of how to implement such proceedings. Learning of the Reader's and Writer's Workshop may have been too late for this particular class but certainly useful for future classes.

The composition of the class made things interesting as well. There was a total of thirteen students whose range of abilities was rather diverse. The group included a non-reader, one boy who was an emergent reader, two boys who focused on their work occasionally, five able students who cooperated well all the time, plus four children who had been behavior problems since the day they entered school. One of those had a diagnosed behavior problem with hyperactivity, another was frequently moody, another had a difficult home life and acted out on a regular basis, and another joined in whenever someone acted out. There were days when I did not know where to turn next. I felt like a first year teacher with no experience.

My first thought was that I must be doing something wrong. I spent quite a bit of time preparing for class. I was beginning to think that I was working much harder than the students. There were activities ready and resources available. One boy, however, dominated the whole class when he decided he did not like what someone had said or he did not want to participate in a particular activity. On one occasion he even jumped up and started a fist fight in the middle of the class. I used time outs, called his parents, and tried in-school suspensions and out of school suspensions. He would quiet down for several weeks then burst out again. It was an extremely exasperating situation with no supports in place to adequately address the matter.

In my efforts to get the classroom functioning effectively, I did find several things that worked well. The students loved for me to read aloud. I did this frequently and they often illustrated the story while I was reading. They loved to paint and could usually

relate the painting to some theme or story we had done. It was a popular way of showing what they knew on a topic. They loved to model with play dough, everything from snowmobiles with intricate detail on the motors, to caribou, to boats and they would explain things to me as they went along. Computer time also went over well. Students could earn time on the computer by completing tasks.

I truly believe that many of these students spent hours in front of a television or the Nintendo game at home. If there was a video available on some topic or a movie related to a theme we were doing, their interest would be intense. The same was true for certain programs on the computer. I found that these students responded intently to visual stimulation.

There were perhaps five students who liked to write. They would write a story, have a peer read it, make some changes and then have a teacher conference to discuss some points which needed refining. The others found the writing process difficult and would give up before getting very far. Their preference was to illustrate and they seldom got around to finishing a story. For traditional teachers, this is a little difficult to handle. I think my traditional roots were battling with the concept of students being responsible and trusting them to make learning choices. Stepping back and letting students talk, choose, and learn takes time, patience and confidence on the part of the teacher.

I felt like a learner throughout the whole year, but I found that I learned many things the hard way. One comment that I read from Jim Grant (1995 p.45) about multi-age teaching is that it could not be a "dump and hope situation" where any group was put

together and called a multi-age class or that if there were too many "needy" students in the class, it would not work. Our classroom that school year was living proof. Although Grant's remarks applied to a situation where there was a choice in the class a student would attend, and ours was not a matter of choice, balance does have to prevail in the class to allow it to function smoothly. The environment presented opportunities to make choices and too many of the students had not previously been taught to make appropriate choices. I had taken some time to practice our routine, but more time should have been spent at this as was evidenced as the year progressed. For the five or six students who already were capable of working independently, liked to read and write, and could express their interests and show what they had learned, it was great. They could pick their own projects and do them well. The problem was the less able learners kept interrupting the learning of others. And maybe I was unable to provide the less able learners with the individual instruction they required. It was a problem bigger than I could fix in one year without the proper supports in the way of special needs teacher, assistants in the class, and access to guidance counselors and psychologists on a regular basis. My lack of experience in such a setting compounded the problem as well.

But I did keep track of the students' work by using checklists and portfolios. In my classroom, the portfolio collections still need input from the students. A portfolio can easily prove to be a valuable and authentic assessment instrument.

The kindergarten-one-two class worked out well. The group was a little more cohesive. They were eager and loved to write. Any time that I found some interesting

article about cross-curricular integration, the writing process, or using response journals, I would tell my only other staff person. Frequently, she would begin using the idea the next day. She let the children eavesdrop, and when they were ready, they would do their interpretation of an activity. We saw such progress in the kindergartens from their scribbled writing at the beginning of the year, to their starting to form letters, to copying words and poems to actual entries in the journal. This teacher was fortunate to have parents who volunteered in the classroom. There is a point to be made here as well. Parents require some training and an understanding of the expectations in the classroom before they can successfully assist in the classroom. We had a case where a parent had time on her hands but used questionable methods when interacting with the students. Such cases could be avoided with some preparation before they enter the classroom and some modelling from the teacher to show how she would interact with the students. That is something that should be done at the beginning of every school year before parents volunteer in the class.

It was because of the progress that we could see in the kindergarten-one-two class there that my faith in multi-age teaching still exists. I really believe Jim Grant's (1995 p.45) contention that the class should be balanced as well as diverse. Although in most rural areas we do not have the same choice, alterations may have to be made to class dynamics over time if flexible grouping doesn't compensate for existing problems. Difficulties arise when there are either too many children with special needs (including

both the very able and the disabled), too many children of the same age, or too many of the same gender. The success of a multi-age class depends on diversity.

The year for this class did end on a happy note. We had been talking all year about visiting Gros Morne National Park and staying at Killdevil camp for the night. We sent out letters to the parents explaining what was required for them to take, arranged rides and chaperones, had a countdown to the day of departure and off we went. We had two vans and a car and drove the couple of hours to Rocky Harbour. I think all the parents were apprehensive about the behavior of some of the children. But, all went well. We visited the Interpretation Center, Lobster Cove Head Lighthouse, the Rocky Harbour Swimming Pool, and stayed in the cabins at Killdevil. The park interpreters did an excellent job with a pond study and the students were really interested and knowledgeable about the bugs we saw. It was truly a worthwhile couple of days with real, hands on experiences. This is how I would like to start a year with a multi-age class.

For the 1998-1999 school year, I moved to a Kindergarten to Grade 3 school which was organized by single grades. We were designated as a necessarily existent school which occurs in rural Newfoundland and Labrador when the distance to travel to another school by bus is too long to be feasible, thus giving us an extra teacher to help deliver the curriculum when the numbers are small and few support services or specialists are available. This would make the transition a little easier. The staff was not ready to begin multi-aging, therefore the school remained single-grade. My assignment included a single-age grade three class in the morning with administrative duties in the afternoon.

Another teacher on staff taught math and had reading time in the afternoon.

The strategies I used in the single-age grade 3 class were the same as I would use in a multi-age environment. The difference of course was there was some diversity there but not to the extent as if children with an age span of between two to three years had been learning together. I encouraged the students to think of all of us as a community of teachers and learners. We discussed this frequently and they demonstrated their abilities to teach others how to do things in the form of a craft corner for our newspaper or by peer tutoring in language at various skills and by helping with puzzles or math problems. We made up a classroom rule that they had to ask at least three other people how to spell a word or how to complete an activity before they asked me. We shared our favorite stories and I read aloud on a daily basis. We modeled predicting what would happen in a story and why we liked or disliked certain stories. I did not know how to properly implement a workshop approach to teaching language arts. But the year allowed me to investigate as many strategies as possible and attend a three-day inservice on Reader's and Writer's Workshop. This initiative could have been particularly helpful as several of my students read a tremendous number of books, but I didn't know how to get them to respond. After my in-service time this year I realize the importance of choice and the importance of using response journals as a means of assessment and evaluation. These and other strategies being developed and encouraged by school boards demonstrate the importance of ongoing professional development and the necessity of the teacher seeing him or herself as a learner in an ever-changing environment--the same as you would expect from

a student in a child-centered classroom.

I integrated as much social studies and health into the language arts especially when covering themes on Community. Art was quite readily integrated across the curriculum. We visited the Senior's Home for our Valentine's Day Party bringing them cards, banners and posters made in the classroom. We all sang songs and several girls performed a line dance. Parents also became involved by providing transportation and lunches for all. Journal writing before and after the event linked real-life experiences with an assortment of writing skills and provided a reason to write.

Students became actively involved in Enterprise projects as we made and sold sandwich maker sandwiches. We also conducted a flea market and made over fifty dollars towards our field trip to Gros Morne National Park. Parents and students worked together conducting experiments at various centers during our Weather theme. Quite often students helped sell ice cream and milk and fill class orders from the younger students. This helped with their math skills.

Students could choose their partners for group work and were permitted to pick a partner and pick a place for shared reading. Occasionally, I would choose heterogeneous partners for projects. The groups changed continuously with students changing who they would work with for writing a play, or designing a poster or doing math.

Assessment in the class was continuous and authentic. As I circulated throughout the class, I carried a clipboard with each student's name and a block by each. I would usually see about five students individually over the course of a day, and write anecdotal

comments about their writing, spelling, group work or whatever I had noticed about the student. Using journals, science logs, projects and presentations made assessing the student more thorough. Although I had not begun using portfolio assessment, students had kept much of their work in file folders. Our next step is to have student and teacher choose items from their work which shows progress over time.

Our school district had piloted a new evaluation policy throughout the district which encouraged authentic assessment. The five stage assessment encouraged parents to visit the school at the beginning of the year for a curriculum night. The expectations of the school were outlined, as well as providing an opportunity for parents to meet teachers and discuss the procedure for the year. This was followed up by an oral interview where parents and teacher could discuss any concerns with the child's progress and kept track of it with jot notes on a form. A formal report using anecdotal comments with a space provided to indicate multi-age if applicable is sent out in January. My anecdotal comments on a continuous basis made this process easier. The student-led conference was held in the spring. Students were invited to help set up centers of activities which would show parents the kind of activities they were involved in during class. The pride with which those students brought their parents through the process certainly made it worthwhile. They later wrote the primary coordinator and commented on their thoughts about the process--another reason to write a letter. The final stage is another formal report in June using anecdotal comments.

As I look forward to a multi-age 2-3 classroom in the fall where I shall be team

teaching with another colleague, I am delighted that our district is striving to encourage and support the implementation of multi-age classrooms throughout the district as they have recently demonstrated by hiring a person to serve as the multi-age specialist for our school district. Their commitment to professional development through our two-day inservices in the fall along with promoting teacher exchanges and providing a person with whom to dialogue, should provide the support necessary to make changes in the delivery of curriculum which will match the developmental needs of students and stress the importance of learning communities.

The Journey Gains Momentum

The journey to reach the point where I am today in my career has taken more than twenty years. As a novice teacher, I was ill-prepared and nervous about entering a classroom. My only alternative was to teach the way I was taught. Unfortunately, the single-grade concept did not fit with the multi-grade situation in which I found myself. It took a while to figure things out on my own and this did cause some problems. I did, however, have a working system that got me through a few years. I resigned after four years of teaching to start a family and that is when I started rethinking the way I did things and wondered how to make things better for the children in my class.

Several important ideas have appeared from my reflection. I have noticed that effective leadership can contribute to successful implementation of programs and new teaching strategies. I realize that a different approach to the curriculum, one which is

child-centered, lends itself to arousing students' interest. Classrooms may be organized in ways that differ from the traditional way—a multi-age continuous progress classroom, for example, allows for developmentally appropriate instruction in a democratic atmosphere. Instructional strategies may change to match the needs of individual students. Student assessment and evaluation is changing so that it is more closely aligned with the curriculum and is more authentic. Parental involvement and community partnerships are essential to successful student achievement. As I have begun to observe and reflect on these ideas, I have noticed a change in my personal philosophy and my teaching practices.

Upon returning to school, I began taking university courses and took advantage of any professional development and in-service days that were available. I have spoken to other teachers, attended seminars, conferences, read and tried to stay current with regard to teaching and learning practices. I think my practice has evolved over the years. There are methods I am comfortable with and approaches that suit me. I feel that the multi-age philosophy is making sense. I have read and heard about many practical suggestions for classroom practice, and I have been able to see, first hand, classrooms with the multi-age approach in use. It remains for me to put it all together, to find the top of the puzzle box with the big picture on it to see where the pieces fit. I have tried implementing some activities and ideas, and will continue to assess and to try again. I'm at the point where becoming a competent multi-age teacher is what I strive for every day. The journey appears smoother as the road nears completion.

Chapter 5

Analysis

Upon reflecting on this narrative, several themes and patterns recur, among them: beliefs about teaching and learning, classroom organization and management, the nature of the curriculum, instructional strategies, the relationship between teacher and student including varying roles and responsibilities, leadership and support including professional development, student assessment and evaluation, parental and community involvement, and the practitioner's desire to make changes to her professional practices.

In order to analyze the narrative, each theme or pattern will be taken in turn and discussed in relation to each stage of the journey of change from traditional teaching to multi-grade teaching and on to multi-age continuous progress teaching. The analysis of the themes and patterns should serve to highlight the necessary conditions for change, which may prove helpful for other teachers embarking upon a journey of transformation and growth.

Beliefs about Teaching and Learning

Early in my career, my belief in the traditional methods of teaching was a natural extension of being schooled that way myself, and perhaps of moving from a controlled family life into a classroom situation totally controlled by the teacher. I believed very strongly that the teacher was in charge of every aspect of the classroom including scheduling, seating arrangements, instructional strategies, and evaluation. It meant that

the teacher, most often working in isolation, planned and instructed the class in a lecture style using a prescribed curriculum with prescribed texts which necessitated scheduling separate times for the various curricular areas. A belief in the teacher as "imparter of knowledge" to the whole class resulted in an expectation that students must be quiet and orderly. Underlying single gradedness and a prescribed curriculum was a belief that all students who were of approximately the same age and in the same class were at the same level developmentally. Students who were unable to meet the goals outlined for the grade level were considered to have failed, and the "cure" was to have these students repeat the same grade. I believed that, as a teacher, I had to demonstrate that I knew all the answers, and I expected students to see me that way.

The move to a multi-grade situation at the beginning of my teaching career did little to change my beliefs about teaching and learning. Furthermore, I considered a multi-grade classroom to be an undesirable and stressful assignment. I still believed that the classroom should be teacher-directed, and I continued to use a lecture style to impart knowledge. I also felt that the curriculum should emphasize content. Because of the multi-grade organization, I believed the only way to ensure that students learned what they were expected to learn was to juggle two or more sets of text books. There was no collaboration among students because most students, teachers and parents generally considered that to be cheating.

As my first year of teaching in 1975 progressed, things did not feel right for me. I began to feel uncomfortable with the amount of control and intimidation I thought I was

expected to wield. The workload was unmanageable and began not to make sense, especially when students questioned what they were doing and learning. The expectations held for all of the students appeared unreasonable for some. It occurred to me that the classroom and the curriculum could be managed differently to achieve the same goals. Although I did not know what I was looking for at the time, my beliefs were changing. Consequently, I needed support, direction, and training in order to make things work better.

Through networking with other teachers, attending conferences, reading professional literature and attending university, I began to learn about multi-age continuous progress classrooms, and my old beliefs about teaching and learning truly began to change. Multi-age continuous progress addressed my many questions and concerns. Multi-age continuous progress is a child- or learner-centered approach which promotes the use of developmentally appropriate practices as supported by Bredekamp (1987), Theilheimer (1993, p.89), and Grant & Johnson (1995, p.56). The use of developmentally appropriate practice addressed my concerns about some students not being able to handle the same texts and assigned tasks as others in the class. Focusing on the individual differences and presenting open-ended activities which allows students to respond on their own level about handling the diversity in the classroom. Building a community of learners where I would also be one of the learners is a focal point of a multi-age continuous progress approach as Maeda (1994, p.7), Rathbone (1993, p. 25), and Bingham (1995, p. 7) promote. A view to holistic learning (Maeda 1994, p.7), which

supports the idea of becoming continuous lifelong learners (Banks 1995, p.1) is emphasized as is active student involvement using open-ended activity time and active concrete learning experiences (Bingham 1995, p.13). Skills are applied in real-life situations (Maeda 1994, p.14) and I could see that several of the outdoor and interest-oriented activities I had planned from years before would fit perfectly and be considered valuable.

With the teacher as facilitator (Banks 1995, p.14), rather than the omniscient imparter of knowledge, the emphasis is placed on the process of learning rather than the end product or content (Grant & Johnson 1995, p.97). An integrated curriculum (Banks 1995, p.14) permits students to see relationships in their work and practical applications for their skills. A flexible classroom structure (Banks 1995, p.12) which allows mobility, choice and interaction (Maeda 1994, p.15) is more conducive to a natural, instinctive way for children to explore and learn. Because a multi-age continuous progress classroom supports an authentic curriculum, it follows that it must also support authentic assessment practices. I could see that artificial testing no longer would have a place in my classroom. My beliefs in the way students learn have changed drastically.

I now believe in Cambourne's (1988) conditions which support learning. These important conditions of immersion, expectation, response, demonstration, approximation, responsibility and practice encourage learners to become truly engaged in the learning process when these conditions are present.

It has become obvious to me that, in order for changes in instructional practices to occur, teachers must continually reflect on and analyze their practices in the light of new research on teaching and learning and in the light of their own beliefs. Teachers have to be curious about other approaches and best practices (Bingham 1995, p.196) to achieve the goals and objectives outlined for the class. Teachers have to see a need for change and notice that some ideas or beliefs no longer have the same importance or relevance in their teaching practice. Without this recognition, it would be fruitless to explore the option of changing teaching practices.

Classroom Organization and Management

As the strict enforcer of rules and the controller of scheduling, seating, routines, and noise, I saw the role of the traditional teacher as quite inflexible. The classroom had to be run by a rigid daily schedule which left little room to maneuver, and there was no possibility of exploring any interests students might have outside of the prescribed text. The goal was to finish each chapter in the prescribed text by the end of the semester, or the year in order to do the testing required to affix marks to a report card for parents. Parents and the school principal had certain expectations about how a classroom was to be run. Although parents rarely came to the school, strict discipline was expected to be enforced with the application of corporal punishment as required. Many parents would punish students at home if a report arrived concerning bad behavior. The principal evaluated teachers once every four or five years in a very artificial way by making appointments to visit the class and observing the teacher's performance.

My multi-grade class was set up in a similar way to the way I had operated a single- grade classroom. I began to find that this did not suit my personality or teaching style. I wanted to get to know the students and have them feel good about being in school rather than being afraid to ask questions and participate in class discussions. I wanted to let them talk to their classmates and work on assignments together even if it was a worksheet of questions. I did not feel that there was a good reason to separate children by grade but generally taught to a whole grade group and used whatever the remaining time allowed to move from desk to desk checking on each individual's progress. Although I maintained a multi-graded classroom organization for the first few years, I began to recognize a need for flexibility.

A multi-age continuous progress classroom reinforces many of my beliefs in the kind of classroom organization and management style that enables students to learn best. The teacher has to trust students to learn what they need (Bingham 1995, p.198) and be willing to relinquish some of the control usually held in the classroom. It makes sense to establish routines through modeling and practice that give students the opportunity to choose with whom they read and work as well as where they do it. It seems natural to establish classroom rules in collaboration with students (Banks 1995, pp. 59-66). Cooperative learning and talking contribute to how students make sense of their world and learn new ideas. With the teacher as facilitator and model, students can benefit from the teacher's enthusiasm for reading and writing and choose topics which interest them to explore many possibilities. As students assume more responsibility for their own

learning, the teacher has more time to spend with individuals or small groups (Maeda 1994, p.15) to concentrate on concepts which require presentation or reinforcement. The teacher sets up a relaxed, safe atmosphere where students are free to take risks and learn at their own pace within a community of learners.

<div align="center">Curriculum</div>

As a traditional teacher in multi-graded classroom I adhered strictly to the Program of Studies and the curriculum as laid out by the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador. The prescribed texts were used by each student as the principal resource and less value was given to other resources. Basal readers provided the graded reading material by which reading levels were judged. Teachers saw themselves and their students, not as curriculum developers, but as curriculum implementers.

My multi-grade class was set up in the same way except, as I have already mentioned, the textbooks doubled or tripled depending on the number of grades in the class. The same standards with the same texts and the same expectations per grade level applied. The workload in this situation was phenomenal. In order to lessen the amount of curricular material I had to become familiar with to present it to the class, I started "flip-flopping" the curriculum. This meant that students were not separated by grade for instruction. Instead, I set up a two year plan whereby I would, for example, teach grade six topics in year one and grade five topics in year two. The topic selection would then be reversed in order to ensure that students did not repeat the same topics while they were

in my class. A simple adjustment such as this allowed whole class instruction with everyone covering the same material. This still did not fully account for individual differences. Instead, it allowed teaching to be aimed at the middle portion of the class in the hope that most students' needs would be met. "Flip-flopping" the curriculum begins to shift more responsibility to the teacher's ingenuity while still ensuring that curricular goals are met. It falls short in addressing students' needs.

By contrast, the curriculum in a multi-age continuous progress classroom is the responsibility of both teacher and students. An integrated approach to curriculum (Banks 1995, p.27; Maeda 1994, p. 9) is used to achieve the goals and objectives as laid out by the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation. Whatever resources are available may be used to meet the individual needs of students and accommodate for their different learning styles (Banks 1995, p.29). I find children's literature particularly effective for language instruction and use basal readers as supplementary material. I emphasize the writing process with a whole language approach to language arts instruction; provide self-directed activities; promote continuous individual progress; stress creative and critical thinking and emphasize higher level thinking skills. Keyboarding and word processing skills are included in the curriculum with as much access to the latest technology as possible. The broad spectrum of possibilities now available to teacher and student should provide topics of interest for all learners. Teachers looking for a different approach to curriculum will find many possibilities using a multi-age approach as Banks (1995, p. 27-36) has outlined

for the creation of a multi-age class.

<u>Instructional Strategies</u>

Instructional strategies used by many teachers in traditionally organized classrooms common to our school were virtually the same lecture style, whole class approach. There was little consideration given to students' stages of development, or to the different ways students learned or represented what they learned. When a task was assigned, any problems were usually handled at the teacher's desk. Most instruction was conducted from behind the teacher's desk and in front of the chalkboard to the whole class, at least this was my experience and the way I first taught.

My experiences in a multi-grade class did little to change the nature of my instruction. I tried to incorporate more discussion and opportunities for students to work together, but basically my teaching strategies were to read the textbook to the class, discuss and give worksheets. In most cases, students had to memorize facts for testing. Eventually, as I got to know the students, I could see that the reason the students were not doing so well is that they were on different levels and did not learn in the same way. For example, many students were adept at learning skills which had been demonstrated to them at home including filling snowshoes, mending nets, knitting and crocheting. In my classroom, skill and drill remained the main methods of instruction, and this proved ineffective and boring to students.

As I read more about multi-age instruction and talked with teachers using this

approach in their classes, it became apparent that instruction could be much more flexible and varied. Students could be consulted on the agenda for the day and given some choice as to when things could be done. Language arts, math and other subjects could be taught through the use of such approaches as "workshopping" (Fiderer 1993, p.8). Workshops provide students with choice and time to work in a supportive atmosphere. The structure includes a mini-lesson of approximately five or ten minutes during which the teacher provides demonstrations and instruction on one aspect of the work students are engaged in at the time. Another five minutes are spent on a "status-of-the-class" conference during which students quickly let the teacher know what they will be working on that day. For the bulk of the workshop (perhaps about thirty minutes), students work on their plan for the day. This might include experimenting, researching, reading, writing, conferencing with the teacher or with peers, or going to the library to name but a few of the possible workshop activities. A final ten minutes is set aside as a sharing time. This allows students to present finished work or to ask for comments and assistance on work in progress.

Workshop structures can be developed by students working collaboratively with the teacher. As an example, I heard of one group of primary children in a multi-age classroom working with FBI—their acronym for Favourite Book Investigations, a language arts workshop they had developed with their teacher. Initially, they had decided that the procedures for FBI should include selection of an appropriate book, reading the

book aloud to a peer and the teacher, approval of the selection by both a peer and the teacher, and selection of activities for responding to the reading from a list of generic activities (e.g. an artistic response, a double-entry journal response, a dramatic response). As time went on, the children and the teacher worked together to refine and modify the workshop procedures. Children were taught how to keep track of their work and how to demonstrate to the teacher what they had accomplished.

Banks (1995, p. 16-24) outlines several instructional strategies which I have incorporated into my classroom schedule. Some of these strategies include facilitating the learning of individuals; using individual, small group and whole class instruction; mainstreaming special needs students; having special needs teachers working in the classroom; obtaining materials and having a place where children can find them; working cooperatively; using peer tutors and parent volunteers; and having students choose learning activities, etc. Students are motivated because of the choices made available and the opportunity to pursue their interests.

In a multi-age classroom, authentic experiences are incorporated into the student's work as much as possible. If students write letters or make cards, they are posted or hand delivered. When we learned about money, our class held a flea market, advertized and handled the money in aid of our field trip. They made sandwiches and sold them, measured temperatures on a thermometer situated outside and visited insects at an insectarium. Hands-on activities give students an opportunity to discover and make

observations for themselves. All of these strategies help to make learning interesting and attainable for all of the learners in the class.

The Relationship Between the Teacher and the Student

As a teacher in a traditional classroom, I knew and controlled everything. All students faced the teacher waiting to be told what to do next or what knowledge they needed from a certain text. The student was the learner waiting to be taught by that one teacher. There were few other human resources that a student could call upon. Work was done independently and if there were problems, the student had to wait for a turn to see the teacher who had to see all of the students in the class. Respect was demanded. The classroom was quite formal.

My multi-grade class followed the same sort of pattern. The students were identified by grade and were separate entities in the classroom. All depended upon the teacher for knowledge, guidance, direction and reinforcement. A great deal of effort was expended in the traditional and multi-grade classrooms on keeping the room quiet. Procedural matters were of utmost importance leaving little room for creative or individual differences. Again, there was only one teacher in the multi-grade class with all of the students depending on that teacher.

A community of learners is the focal point of the multi-age class. I have tried to emphasize this with my two previous multi-age classes and hope to do the same with my

next 2/3 multi-age class this year. Everyone is a learner and everyone is a teacher. The teacher becomes the facilitator who does not claim to know everything but, rather, helps students find answers to questions. The teacher is aware of individual differences and celebrates the diversity in the classroom. The teacher tries to set up a safe, caring, sharing environment where all learners are willing to take risks. The teacher encourages students to become more responsible for their own learning. The classroom becomes relaxed and friendly with students talking, moving and making choices about their work after being taught how to do these things. The teacher sets up open-ended activities which help meet the needs of all of the students.

<u>Leadership and Support Including Professional Development</u>

At the time when I began teaching in the mid-seventies, there did not appear to be much leadership from the administrators of the school. Their responsibilities appeared to be managerial, with little mention of instructional matters or student achievement. The administrators themselves demonstrated a limited knowledge of methodology and exhibited a "do-what-you-can" attitude. As long as there was order in the classroom and instruction appeared to be happening, the administrators were satisfied. Professional development was unheard of, and most methods courses came from pre-service training or summer school. Professional literature was unavailable and district office personnel were too far away for consultation.

As I moved into a multi-grade classroom, it was not difficult to make changes at first. The administrator at that time was also teaching full time, and any adjustments I could make, such as flip-flopping the curriculum, made his life more manageable as well. The administrator who came next into the position was quite traditional in his beliefs and did not take as kindly to some of the changes I had been making such as permitting talking and mobility in the classroom. He was followed by another administrator who, although somewhat traditional, did support more discussion and hands-on activities. She was quite willing to discuss how we might improve student achievement. None of the administrators, however, really explored changes in teaching strategies, perhaps because they did not appear ready for change themselves. If there had been a principal who was committed to facilitating the professional development of him/herself and his/her staff (Tesckhe 1995, p. 11), my journey towards change may have taken place earlier and more quickly. As an administrator and teacher myself, I hope to encourage others to reflect on their practices and explore the possibility of change over time.

This was probably among the most frustrating constraints of trying to change my practice. Because this was a small rural school, none of the other teachers had the same teaching assignment as I did. They observed the same problems but generally kept to themselves, perhaps because they did not know how to do things differently or were unwilling to try to find some answers to their questions. Being so far away from the district office or the university made researching new ideas practically impossible and the

technology we use so readily now was non-existent in our area.

   The leadership I needed did come from a somewhat unexpected source. A special needs teacher arrived having graduated from university at a time when teaching practices had changed from the traditional to a more hands-on approach. She started using trade books for reading and used theme work to get students reading and writing. She was quite willing to help me incorporate some of those ideas into my classroom. It was not necessarily a multi-age approach, but it was good classroom practice and I benefitted from working with this teacher and observing her practices.

   My present school district is showing the leadership I need at this point in my career by offering professional leadership and in-service for both its teachers and administrators. This helps keep both groups abreast of current approaches.

   It has been through professional development opportunities, both as a classroom teacher and as an administrator, that I have found the philosophy, useful approaches, and many practical suggestions on how to implement a multi-age approach to teaching. Having the opportunity to take advantage of the conferences made available through special interest councils, the Department of Education in our province, the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, the school district, or by visiting the classroom of multi-age practitioners have supported me in my quest to improve and change my teaching practices.

Student Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting

Traditional assessment and evaluation of students meant practice and drill of skills throughout the year until it was time for exams, usually three times a year. Traditionally, students' work throughout the year had little bearing on the final mark on the report card. The tests on which the final grades were determined, generally consisted of questions dependent on rote memorization of content.

This method changed somewhat as I started teaching in a multi-grade class. Students' grades were based equally on exams and on projects and assignments done during the course of the school year. The teacher, however, was the sole evaluator and students had no role in evaluating their own progress.

Parents had reports sent home to them and were expected to attend Parent-Teacher Conferences on two occasions throughout the year. Parents were familiar with this sort of evaluation scheme; that is, testing to determine the marks on the report which quite frequently was used as a system of comparison among students. The top three marks were usually announced publicly thereby making this system quite competitive.

Assessment and evaluation in a multi-age setting is much more authentic (Banks 1995, p.104; Maeda 1994, p. 14; Politano 1994, p. 81). It focuses on what students are actually doing and is on-going throughout the school year. The teacher and students keep records of progress and achievement, and the teacher reports on the student by using anecdotal comments so the process is much more cooperative. Student-led conferences

where students lead parents through activities in the classroom are also being incorporated into the assessment of students. The evaluative process emphasizes the process of learning as well as the products of learning.

Portfolios are commonly used as a means of assessing students' progress in a multi-age classroom (Banks 1995, p.104; Maeda 1994, p.81; Politano 1994, p.89). Students maintain files of their work in all curricular areas so that growth over time can be observed. For evaluative purposes, students of all ages can be shown how to select samples of their best work for their portfolios. The "collections" portfolio then becomes the "demonstration of achievement" portfolio. By such means, students as well as the teacher are involved directly in determining what they have learned. Our staff has just begun the use of portfolios with the Kindergarten and grade one class. This trend will continue during the 1999-2000 school year as we introduce them into the multi-age 2/3 class. They will prove quite useful as we teach students to choose appropriate pieces and discuss these choices with parents during our student-led conference in the spring.

<u>Parental and Community Involvement</u>

Traditionally, parents seldom got involved in the education of their children. Some did help with homework or read stories to their children. Most visited if there was an Open House and school concerts were well attended. Some would show up at school if there was a problem. Otherwise, reports were sent home and times assigned for parents to meet the teacher to hear how their child was doing. Communication was quite limited

with few attempts made by the staff of a school to make the parents feel welcome.

While I taught in multi-grade situations, the same was true for most parents. They seldom visited unless they were invited and wanted to know how the child was behaving more than what they were achieving. The word soon spread throughout the community if a student was a discipline problem or if the teacher was unable to control the classroom. There was a stigma attached to being asked to the school if it wasn't parent-teacher night as it usually meant there was trouble of some sort.

The community of learners in a multi-age class build parent support by providing an open door policy and by letting them know they can make a positive difference (Maeda 1994, p. 44). Any human resources available are solicited to help with numerous activities from preparing materials, to listening to reading, to editing writing and checking off work, etc. When everyone is a learner and a teacher, there is always some contribution a parent or volunteer can make.

As I have been working in a multi-age setting, I have noted that the communication between home and school has greatly increased. When parents are invited into a school initially to provide some sort of a luncheon or attend a social gathering, and are made to feel welcome, they often return to volunteer in other capacities. Many parents have organized fall fairs, photocopied materials, completed library reshelving, helped with computers and assisted the teacher in the classroom. As time goes on and parents realize that education has changed and that they are valued in

the scheme of things, their contributions will increase. They too have to be educated as changes are made in every aspect of schooling. When they can see for themselves how things are working, they become more trusting of the school and staff and become open to new ideas about teaching and learning. Parents, students and teachers all become part of the learning community.

Desire

One essential component of becoming a competent multi-age practitioner, which I consider to be extremely important, is the desire to want to do so (Rathbone 1993, p.171). Teachers have a tendency to become cynical about new approaches, new fads or buzz words which tend to appear, gain some notoriety and disappear without a resulting change in classroom instruction or student achievement. A teacher must be a reflective practitioner who is always assessing what is happening in the classroom and looking for new ways of meeting individual needs and increasing student achievement and revamping approaches to achieve those goals.

When I first began teaching in a multi-grade situation, very few around me appeared to want to change their practice. Human and material resources to implement any sort of change were at a premium and distances from board office, university, or other teachers whose practice resembled what I was seeking, were prohibitive. It would have been easier to maintain the status quo and leave things the way they were. Working alone

in a school with a staff who did not see the value of what I was suggesting, or with parents who thought that a multi-age class was reverting to the way things were done when they went to school, was difficult and disheartening at times.

As I delved further into the possibilities of setting up a multi-age class in my position as teacher and principal, I encouraged one teacher to team teach with me. That was enjoyable and difficult at the same time as we knew of no one at the time with whom to discuss approaches and solutions to our problems. At the end of a year, that teacher and I had learned enough about the approach to be able to discuss it with parents who, in turn, entrusted their children to our guidance as multi-age teachers. I became more encouraged.

I became a risk-taker as I expected the students to be. I tried some things which worked well and others which failed miserably, and I learned from those mistakes. Often, I understood the concept but lacked knowledge of the details. That is what encouraged me to keep reading, to keep talking to other practitioners and to seek advice and any professional development opportunities relevant to the multi-age approach.

As I have begun team teaching this fall, I find the support I get from my colleagues as we plan together most reassuring. As we are just starting the first week of classes, we are trudging very slowly as we have decided to use Reader's and Writer's Workshop for the multi-age two/three class. We have started with procedural matters about how to choose a book and intend to practice this for several days more. We intend

to proceed from choosing an appropriate book to teaching the grade one class how to choose a book in a big buddy-little buddy arrangement. After that we see choosing a book and sharing it with the class during a shared reading time. Our decision to begin with only one change now--that of the introduction of the Reader's and Writer's Workshop, allows us to organize ourselves and become used to the approach. Although we have these eighteen students together for an hour and fifteen minutes, we are beginning to see how we can integrate our science and math into this approach and hope to extend our practice over the next year. It is my hope to include the grade one class in the mix by next year to create two multi-age 1/2/3 classes. This will require more planning, discussion and collaboration on the part of the staff. However for the first time I am hopeful that the arrangement will take place.

The desire to want to do the best for my students, to find an approach that works for my classroom community, and to become a life-long learner has been the driving force behind my persistence and perseverance. It has led me on a journey that has taken many detours and through road construction along the way. The desire to do a good job will stay with me as the journey to become a competent multi-age practitioner continues.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

Initially, I was skeptical of the decision to use the narrative form to explore my journey from traditional teaching through multi-grade and on to multi-age practice. I had never used this process before and was wary of its value to other practitioners and its usefulness as a means of qualitative inquiry for me. Having stepped back and looked at my own practice, I now realize that there can be benefits derived for other practitioners and for me by using this method of inquiry. Following are the conclusions I have made from an analysis of the narrative.

The narrative has been the vehicle that allows me to describe my professional journey. It has allowed me to reflect on my personal practical knowledge including influences from my childhood, early schooling, university and professional development opportunities; and on my teaching experiences including interaction with students, other teachers, district office personnel, and the process of teaching. I have developed a new understanding of curriculum and instruction from my reflections, and I have also been able to consider alternate ways of teaching. I believe that the narrative and its analysis can enable my professional colleagues to identify with my experiences and to draw their own conclusions about teaching and learning from these experiences.

Upon reflecting on my practice, I can see certain conditions for change emerging from the narrative which may be helpful for other teachers considering change in their practice. First, it is necessary to identify personal beliefs about teaching and learning and to determine how those beliefs can help or impede a change in practice. Second, it is

necessary to examine classroom organization and management with a view to identifying those factors which better support learning. Taking a different perspective on curriculum and seeking alternate instructional strategies comes next. A further condition is noting and establishing a collaborative relationship between student and teacher and determining the roles and responsibilities in that relationship. Having access to effective leadership and the support necessary to implement successful change as well as the professional development and in-service required to complete the task is a necessary condition. Understanding the importance of utilizing a student assessment and evaluation policy which coincides with the philosophy behind the multi-age approach is critical. Being committed to including parental and community involvement in education is another condition. Last but not least, the desire to want to change is one of the essential conditions for changing any practice. All of these conditions have emerged from my analysis of the narrative.

Limitations do exist in this qualitative inquiry. First, I recognize the difficulty of carrying out an analysis of a personal narrative. It is far more difficult to be objective than when examining a narrative written by someone else. I have tried, however, to stand back from the narrative and to let the themes and patterns emerge from my reading. Second, I recognize that while I have thoroughly examined the research literature on multi-age continuous progress classrooms and used this research to examine changes in my practices, it would have been more illuminating had I been able to track students in

my own class in order to assess the effects of the classroom on their social, emotional and academic achievement. Given I was unable to go back in time to assess the students I have taught, I believe the approach I have taken to be the best one possible under the circumstances.

In looking ahead to possibilities for future research, it would be useful to see how many classes using the multi-age approach at present continue to do so over the next few years, and to determine why these classes continue to exist or why they do not.

I believe that change will not happen in classroom practice until practitioners are ready and willing to seek what they need to make any changes and obtain the support necessary from other teachers, the administration and district office in order to implement successful change.

Any teacher, group of teachers, or school improvement team wishing to make a change from single-grade, multi-grade or traditional methods of teaching or attempting to look at curriculum and its delivery in their own classrooms, would find that multi-age instruction is flexible and has application in any teaching situation.

Finally, all I have read in the literature on multi-age teaching and my own personal experiences throughout a twenty year career, points to multi-age as being appropriate for the way children learn. For this reason, many teachers in urban areas are choosing to organize their classrooms using this approach because of its effectiveness when implemented properly. As teachers in rural areas become aware of the

characteristics and advantages, I feel with proper training and support, they too will use the multi-age approach throughout their schools and feel enthusiastic about the prospect.

The problem as I see it lies with the parameters under which we operate. Until we can use monies made available for the purchase of textbooks to buy appropriate literature for our classrooms, and until we can eliminate the accountability evaluation based on standardized testing and focus on mastering nongraded (Gaustad 1992) or multi-age techniques, the implementation of multi-age classes will progress slowly.

Our Department of Education and our school districts are supporting the multi-age approach as a valuable means of educating students. They have made teacher exchanges available, hired a multi-age specialist in the case of our district, and made some money available for in-service and professional development. However, as long as teachers see the expectations about student achievement and accountability as being inconsistent with the expectations suggested with the multi-age approach, they will hesitate to become part of the movement.

Although I would not want to see the Department of Education or school boards mandate a non-graded primary, I would like to see them remove the impediments and wave grade-oriented regulations which would lessen pressure on teachers. John Thompson, director of policy for the Kentucky School Boards Association, says boards must do the following to ensure that Kentucky's new primary program succeeds:

1. Make sure their teachers receive sufficient training.
2. Inform their communities.

3.   Find funding for transition expenses.

4.   Monitor their schools' progress and assist in evaluating and improving the implementation process (Gaustad 1992b).

I have seen great strides being made in the recent past towards the implementation of multi-age teaching in our school district and in our province. Memorial University of Newfoundland has launched a new diploma in Telelearning and Rural School Teaching. Although I do not consider the multi-age approach to be a predominately rural concept, this diploma, made available through the School of Continuing Studies, does offer some training in the approach which is a step in the right direction. However we still need more in the way of pre-service training in multi-age teaching made available to all teachers whether they are destined to the larger centers or the remotest rural setting.

In order to make the change from a graded to a nongraded approach, from traditional or multi-grade to multi-age continuous progress, we have to be realistic about the time and resources necessary to make a change of this magnitude. Keeping this in mind, I strongly believe that implementing a multi-age approach to teaching and learning is worth promoting.

References

Alford, R. (1998). The Craft of Inquiry. New York: Oxford Press.

Altrichkter, P. et. al. (1993). Teachers investigate their work. New York: Routhledge.

American Association of School Administrators (1992). The Nongraded Primary: Making Schools Fit Children. Arlington, VA: ASSA.

Anderson, R.H. & Pavan, B.N. (1993). Nongradedness: Helping It to Happen. Lancaster, P.A.: Technomic Press.

Angus, D.L., Mirel, J.E. & Vinovskis, M.A. (1988). Historical development of age stratification in schooling. Teachers College Record, 90(2), 211-236.

Banks, J. C. (1995). Creating the Multi-age Classroom. Edmonds, WA.: CATS Publications.

Baksh, I.J. & Singh, A. (1978). In D. Mulcahy Learning and Teaching in Multi-grade Classrooms. St. John's, NF: Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Berk, L. (1980). Education in Lives: Biographic narrative in the study of educational outcomes. The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 2(2), 88-153.

Black, S. (1993). Beyond Age and Grade. The Executive Educator 9: 76-79.

Bingham, A.A. (1995). Exploring the Multiage Classroom. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Bredekamp, S.(Ed.) (1987). Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8. Washington, DC:

National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Brown, A.L., Bransford, J.D., Ferrara, R.A. & Campione, J.C. (1983). Learning, remembering, and understanding. In J. H. Flavell & E.M. Markman (Eds.), Handbook of Child Psychology (4th ed.). Vol. 3: Cognitive development (pp. 515-529). New York: Wiley.

Brown, A. & Palincsar A. (1986). Guided, cooperative learning and individual knowledge acquisition. (Technical Report No. 372). Champaign, IL: Center for the Study of Reading.

Brown, A.L. & Reeve, R.A. (1985). Bandwidths of competence: The role of supportive contexts in learning and development (Technical Report No. 336). Champaign. IL: Center for the Study of Reading.

Caine, R., & Caine, G. (1991). Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Calderhead, J. (1988). Reflective Teaching and Teacher Education. London: Falmer Press.

Cambourne, B. (1988). The Whole Story. Auckland, N.Z.: Ashton-Scholastic.

CELT (1991). The Mixed Age Primary: What and Why. Tempe, AZ: Center for the Expansion of Language and Thinking.

Chapman & Shrenko (1993). If the Shoe Fits...: How to Develop Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom. Palatine, Il: IRI/ Skylight Publishing, Inc.

Chase, P. & Doan, J. (1994). Full Circle: A New Look at Multiage Education. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Cohen, D.L. (1990 May). A look at multi-age classrooms. The Education Digest, LV(9), 20-23.

Cohen, E.G. (1986). Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the heterogenous classroom. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Cohen, P.A., Kulik, J.A. & Kulik, C. (1982). Educational outcomes of tutoring: A meta-analysis of findings. American Educational Research Journal, 19(2), 237-248.

Connell, D.R. (1987, July). The first thirty years were the fairest: notes from the kindergarten and ungraded primary (k-1-2). Young Children, 42(5), 30-39.

Connelly, F.M. & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). Teachers as Curriculum Planners: Narratives of Experience. Toronto, Canada: OISE Press.

Cortazzi, M. (1993). Narrative Analysis. Vol. 12. Social Research and Education Studies, ed. Robert G. Burgess. London: Falmer.

Croll, P. (1986). Systemic Classroom Observation. London: The Falmer Press.

Cushman, K. (1990). "The whys and hows of the multiage primary classroom." American Educator, Summer pp. 28-32, 39.

Davis, R.(1992). The Nongraded Primary: Making Schools Fit Children, Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Day, B. & Hunt, G.H. (1975). "Multi-Age Classrooms: An Analysis of Verbal Communication." The Elementary School Journal, 75: 458-464.

Denizen, N.K. (1989). Interpretive Interactionism. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Doody, L. (1991). The Myriad Mosaic of Multi-Grading. Clarenville, Newfoundland: Bonavista-Trinity-Placentia Integrated School District.

Doud, J.L. & Finklestein, J.M. (1985). A two-year kindergarten that works. Principal, 64(5), 18-21.

Edmonds School District Nongraded Staff. The Edmonds Project: A School of Choice for the 21st Century. Edmonds, WA: Edmonds School District, 1989.

Ellison, A. (1972). The myth behind graded content. Elementary School Journal, 72(4) 212-221.

Fiderer, A (1993). Teaching Writing: A Workshop Approach. Jefferson City, MO: Scholastic Professional Books.

Forester, A.D. & Reinhard, M. (1989). The Learner's Way. Winnipeg, MB, Canada: Peguis Publishers.

Forester, A.D. & Reinhard, M. (1994). The Teacher's Way. Winnipeg, MB, Canada: Peguis Publishers.

Franklin, M.P. (1976). "Multi-Grading in Elementary Education." Childhood Education, 43: 513-516.

Freedman, J. (1984 March). How I learned to stop worrying and love my COMBINATION class. Instructor, XCIII (7), 48-50.

Garamella, M. (1993). "Multi-age Classrooms; Creating Communities for Learning", In Multi-Age Classrooms: The Ungrading of America's Schools. Peterborough, HH: Society for Developmental Education.

Gardner, H. (1983). Frames of Mind: Theory of Multiple Intelligences. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Gaustad, J. (1992). "Making the Transition From Graded to Nongraded Primary Education." Oregon School Study Council Bulletin, 35(8).

Goodlad, J. I. & Anderson, R.H. (1987). The Nongraded Elementary School. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Grant, J. & Johnson, B. (1995). A Common Sense Guide to Multiage Practices. Columbus, OH: Teacher's Publishing Group.

Graziano, W., French, D., Brownell, C., & Hartup, W. (1976). "Peer interaction in same and mixed-age triads in relationship to chronological age and incentive condition." Child Development, 47: 707-717.

Greene, M. (1988). Quality in Teacher Education. Paper presented at the meeting of the Holmes Group: Ann Arbor, MI.

Hart-Hewins, L. & Villiers, U. (1997). Multi-Age Groupings in the Early Years. Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishers Limited.

Hartup W. (1983). "Peer Relations , 103-196." Handbook of Child Psychology: Vol 4. Socialization, Personality, and Social Development. New York : Wiley.

Haughey, M. L. & Murphy, P.J. (1983 February). " What Rural Teachers Think About Their Jobs?" The Canadian School Executive, 2(8), 12-14.

Huttenlocher, P. (1990). "Morphometric Study of Human Cerebral Cortex Development." Neuropsychologia, 28(6), 517-527.

Johnson, D., Johnson, R., Johnson-Holubee, E. & Roy, P. (1984). Circles of Learning: Cooperation in the Classroom. USA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Publications.

Kandal, E. & Hawkins, R. (1992). "The Biological Basis of Learning and Individuality." Scientific American. 276: 79-86.

Kasten, W.C. & Clarke, B. K. (1993). The Multi-Age Classroom: A Family of Learners. Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc.

Katz, L. (1993). "What can we learn from Reggio Emilia?" In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, and G. Forman, eds., The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Katz, L.G. (1988). Engaging Children's Minds: The implications of research for early childhood education. In C. Warger (Ed.), A Resource Guide to Public School Early Childhood Programs. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. pp. 32-52.

Katz, L.G., Evangelou, D., & Hartman, J.A. (1990). The Case for MixedAge Grouping in Early Education. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Konner, M. (1975). "Relations Among Infants and Juveniles in Comparative Perspective." In M. Lewis and L.A. Rosenblum, eds., Friendship and Peer Relations. New York: Wiley.

Lippitt, P. (1976). Learning through cross-age helping: Why and how. In V.L. Allen (Ed.), Children as Teachers: Theory and research on tutoring (pp. 157-168). New York: Academic.

Lougee, M. & Graziano, W. (Undated). Children's Relationships with Non-Agemate Peers. Unpublished Manuscript.

Maeda, B. (1994). The Multi-Age Classroom: An Inside Look at One Community of Learners. Cypress, CA: Creative Teaching Press, Inc.

McClellan, D. (1991). "Children's Social Behavior as Related to Participation in Mixed-Age or Same-Age Groups." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991) Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International Dissertation Information Services.

Miller, B.A. (1994). Children at the Center: Implementing the Multiage Classroom. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory.

Miller, B.A. (1989). The Multigrade Classroom: A Resource Handbook for small rural schools. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Mulcahy, D.M. (1993). Learning and Teaching in Multi-Grade Classrooms. St. John's, NF: Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Mycock, M.A. (1967). "A Comparison of Vertical Grouping in the Infant School." British Journal of Educational Psychology, 37: 133-135.

Oberlander, T.M. (1989, May). "A Non-Graded, Multi-Aged Program That Works." Principal. pp. 29-30.

Ostrow, J. (1995). A Room with a Different View. Markham, Ont.: Pembroke Publishers.

Papadopoulas, A. (1988). The contact school plan: Visit to the Swedish Contact School (Fajanskolan, Falkenberg). Strasberg, France: Council of Europe. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 292 569).

Patterson, L. et. al. (1993). Teachers are Researchers: Reflection and Action. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Piaget, J. (1977). To Understand is to Invent. New York: Penguin.

Pinar, W. (1975). Currere: Toward reconceptualization. In W. Pinar (Ed.), Curriculum theorizing: The reconceptualists. Berkley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corp.

Politano, C. & Davies, A. (1994). Multi-age and More: Building Connections. Winnipeg, MB: Peguis Publishers Limited.

Pratt, D. (1986). "On the Merits of Multi-Age Classrooms." Research in Rural Education. 3(1986) : 111-116.

Rathbone, C., Bingham, A., Dorta, P., McClaskey, M. & O'Keefe, J. (1993). <u>Multiage Portraits: Teaching and Learning in Mixed-age Classrooms.</u> Peterborough, NH: Crystal Springs Books.

Ridgway, L. & Lawton, I. (1965). <u>Family Grouping in the Primary School.</u> London: Ward Lock Educational.

Riggs, F. (1987). Small schools study project: Final report. St. John's, NF: Faculty of Education, Memorial University.

Roopnarine, J.L. (1987). The Social Individual Model: Mixed-age socialization. In J.L. Roopnarine & J.E. Johnson (Eds.), Approaches to Early Childhood Education (pp. 143-162). Columbus, OH:Merrill.

Roopnarine, J.L., & Johnson, J.E. (1984). Socialization in a mixed-age experimental program. <u>Developmental Psychology,</u> 20. 828-832.

Routman, R. (1988). <u>Transitions: From Literature to Literacy.</u> Portsmouth, NH: Heineman Publishing Co.

Russell, T. & Ford, D.F. (1983). Effectiveness of peer tutors versus resource teachers. <u>Psychology in the Schools,</u> 20, 436-441.

Sergiovanni, T.J. (1987). <u>The Principalship: A Reflective Practice Perspective.</u> Newton, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon Inc.

Shannon, P. (1990). The Struggle to Continue: Progressive Reading Instruction in the United States. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Slavin, R.E. (1987). Developmental and motivational perspectives on cooperative learning : A reconciliation. Child Development, 58, 1161-1167.

Society for Developmental Education. (1993). Multiage Classrooms: The Ungrading of America's Schools. Peterborough, NH.

Squire, L. (1992). "Memory, and the Hippocampus: A Synthesis From Findings with Rats, Monkeys, and Humans." Psychological Review, 99: (2)195-231.

Stake, R. (1995). The Art of Case Study Research. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Stehney, V.A. (1970 January). Why multiage grouping in the elementary school. National Elementary Principal, XLIX (3), 21-23.

Theilheimer, R. (1993). "Something for Everyone: Benefits of Mixed-Age Grouping for Children, Parents, and Teachers." Young Children, July, pp. 82-87.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). Mind, Self and Society. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Williams, L., Warren, R., and Pound-Curtis, T. (1992). Our Children, Our Future: Royal Commission Of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, Secondary Education. St. John's, NF: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Webb, T.B. (1992). Multi-age grouping in the early years: Building upon children's developmental strengths. Kappa Delta Pi Record, 28(3). 90-92.

Wertsch, J.V. (1985). Culture, communication, and cognition: Vygotskian perspectives. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Wolfson, B.J. (1967 April). The promise of multiage grouping for individualizing instruction. Elementary School Journal, 67(7), 354-362.