

[Critical Issue: Enhancing Learning Through Multiage Grouping
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/instrctn/in500.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/instrctn/in500.htm)

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Reading material on **multiage**, multigrade teaching. Categories: Grouping, Classrooms, Teaching, General. Grouping. Cohen, E.G. (1986). Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the heterogenous classroom. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. ... 1987). The Social Individual

Model: Mixed-age socialization. In J.L ...
www.stemnet.ca/mirror/reading.html

The Multiage Classroom

Developed by the Combined Elementary Task Forces of the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium (MOEC), Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska at Omaha,

Definition

A multiage classroom is a learning community of children who represent two or more age groups or grade levels. It is a heterogeneous group of children representing the intellectual, cultural and economic profile of the school where the classroom exists. The goal is to use instructional practices and curriculum which maximize the potential benefits of interaction and cooperation among children who vary in experience, maturity and ability. Children with different experiences and stages of development are encouraged to offer or request support from each other for all aspects of classroom activity. As appropriate, large group, small flexible group and individual instruction are utilized. In some cases a group of children and a teacher will stay together for several years.

A multiage classroom is based on the following assumptions of teaching and learning:

- Student diversity is a given. Diversity is viewed as a strength and is central in making the learning community effective. A multiage classroom operates more like a family operates to solve its everyday problems.
- A belief in a teaching model that is interactive in nature, with everyone learning from each other.
- A belief that learning does not necessarily occur in a neat, orderly sequence. Learning is dynamic, complex and developmental.
- A belief that how to learn is as valuable as what is learned. It is not presumed "covering curriculum" is learning.

- A belief that the teacher will facilitate a variety of teaching and learning experiences that will be developmentally appropriate for students in the class, and that children will learn from these experiences.

Key Elements of A Multiage Classroom

- Hands on, interactive learning, with availability of a wide selection of concrete materials that foster math concepts and language development
- A wide selection of real books available to the learner
- Thematic units integrating subject areas
- Team teaching
- Accessing information through multiple resources
- Flexible grouping
- Cooperative learning groups
- Constant monitoring of each student's growth in each subject area, with new learning experiences planned which move the student forward at a rate commensurate with his/her ability
- Developing student independence is a priority
- Children are valued as decision makers and evaluators
- Curriculum is designed to meet the district standards and outcomes, while allowing flexibility to respond to students' interests
- Children are stimulated to ask and answer their own questions
- Parents are treated as partners in their child's education through open and frequent communication
- Students are encouraged to share their knowledge and expertise with others

Benefits of A Multiage Classroom Setting

- The talents and needs of individual students are emphasized.
- It supports/promotes sequential, developmental learning.
- It provides an environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of students.
- Diversity is viewed by both the teacher and the students as a strength and is central in making the learning community effective.
- It provides a structure through which we can meet the needs of students in today's information age society and supports what we know about how children learn best.
- It changes the way teachers view the learners and the curriculum.
- It promotes a recognition of diversity that necessitates appropriate actions and encourages the development of each child. Teachers become more child centered.
- Age alone does not determine the skill level of the child. A multiage setting provides a flexible enough program so that we can take each child at their level and move him/her forward.

- The opportunity to have a student in the class for more than one school year strengthens student/teacher/parent relationships and facilitates positive school experiences. Less time is lost at the beginning of the school year to establish relationships and learn classroom procedures.
- It makes it possible to equalize class loads and keep classes at an optimum size.
- A multiage setting provides frequent opportunities for development of student leadership.

Multi-age Classrooms

A multiage classroom where continuous progress is encouraged works well because every child is unique and has an individual pattern and timing for growth. Such a classroom provides opportunities for children to build progressively on their developing skill and knowledge base as they work toward the Learning Results. There is respect for different learning styles. It is understood that the time it takes for children to reach certain developmental levels is a variable, prompting the elimination of time-based grade-level barriers. Teachers structure a supportive learning environment where children feel successful, develop positive self-concepts, and are helpful and sensitive to others.

One of the major benefits of a multiage classroom is the continuity over time that multiage provides. The student benefits from having the opportunity to stay with the same teacher and classmates and experience the same teaching style and routines over a two year period. Since the teacher is already familiar with many of the students from the previous year, instructional time is not lost getting to know a whole new class of students each year. In a multiage classroom there is time to recognize that a child's social and emotional needs are as important as academic needs, and there is time to devote to those needs. Another advantage of more than one year in a multiage classroom is the relationship developed between the teacher and the entire family.

Academically, students in a multiage classroom get to see a wide spectrum of learning as they work with classmates who are at different places in the learning process. Multiage education emphasizes building upon strengths. Students feel they are successful when they are working at their own level and know that everyone should not be able to do the same thing at the same time. Because the teacher values children as capable learners, she uses open-ended projects to provide for a wide range of abilities and interests. During this time, the teacher can observe and document what each child does and how it is done. Each child is accepted at his or her own place on the developmental learning continuum. The teacher takes time to assess, evaluate and plan next steps for each child. Separate subjects are replaced by an integrated curriculum which engages children in meaningful activities that explore concepts and topics

relevant and meaningful to the lives of the children. Students are grouped in many different ways and often it is by their own choice.

Socially and emotionally, students develop a sense of caring and nurturing or feeling of family, as they help each other learn.

In a classroom where all children are learning at different rates and are not all the same age, there should be little competition. New students joining the class in September find that they have peers to help them learn where everything is located, how to use materials, and with whom they can share their first experiences at school. The children are expected to make many choices throughout the day as they become independent learners. This allows the teacher to have more time to work productively with individuals, also. Students are often more effective at teaching each other than are teachers teaching students. By helping each other, students reinforce their own understanding of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The informal nature of the classroom encourages much interaction between children and between children and adults. Conversations are encouraged as the children talk through their work in progress. These conversations help them understand just what they have learned. While the students are supporting and assisting each other, real leadership qualities have a chance to emerge.