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Introduction

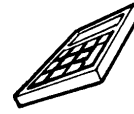
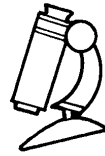
This book is a valuable resource for teachers, containing explanations, suggestions, descriptions, and learning activities for those who are interested in providing a program that offers continuous progress for every child.

A Compact Overview of Contents:

- an explanation of the rationale of Multi-Age grouping
- an explanation of the advantages and disadvantages of Multi-Age grouping
- encouragement for those in transition to a Multi-Age program
- a description of the characteristics of a Multi-Age classroom
- suggestions for practical application of Multi-Age ideas
- tips for organising curriculum and grouping students
- sample learning centre activities
- suggestions for creating an appropriate classroom atmosphere for Multi-Age grouping
- tips for encouraging parental involvement
- answers to questions often asked by teachers about Multi-Age grouping

This handbook is based on a classroom teacher's understanding, training, and experiences as she made the transition from a traditional year four teacher to a year 3, 4 and 5 Multi-Age teacher. Many of the ideas in this book are the result of the collaborated efforts of all team members and school staff.

Multi-Age Definitions



BSA—Beginning School Activity—A brief task for students to work on when they enter the classroom every morning. It may involve a review or application of skills previously taught or provide practice of basic skills.

Block Scheduling—Time allotted for specific activities.

Centres—Learning activities available throughout the classroom.

Continuous Progress—Planning for and providing on-going individual achievement.

Flexible grouping—Arranging students in order to provide optimal learning situations for the greatest number of children possible.

ISA—Integrated Subject Activities including study of society, science, art, physical education, and technology activities relating to the theme.

Ladder maths—A series of maths computation problems, including addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, listed on a page in order of increasing difficulty, used approximately twice a month to assess each child's computational progress.

Literature-based—A method of curriculum planning that integrates a variety of subject areas with selected pieces of literature.

Needs Grouping—Grouping students during a scheduled block of time, such as maths or writing, in order to meet specific needs.

Pod—Group of 2–4 classes which function cooperatively, rotating among their homerooms for block scheduling, needs grouping, centres, and whole group activities.

Three-Year Cycle—A curriculum framework where subject areas and topics are arranged yearly by a common theme and by selected children's literature in three-year rotation.

Spiralling Topics—Revisiting topics periodically to address and provide increased understanding.

Web—a concise outline of related curriculum topics that provides a framework for organising units of study.

Webbing—The process of listing curriculum areas that are related to a particular theme or pieces of literature.

Rationale for Multi-Age Grouping

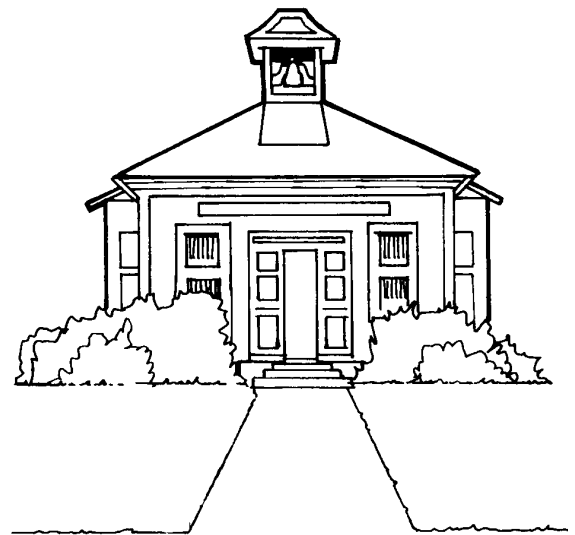
What happens in schools affects individuals and communities. With so much riding on public education, everyone must take part in educational innovations. Students, parents, community representatives, teachers, and administrators are encouraged to find, implement, and support beneficial strategies that increase student learning, progress, and achievement. Multi-Age programs offer one promising solution.

The Need for the Multi-Age Classroom

In the 1840's, Horace Mann implemented the first graded classrooms in the United States. The structure of the school was bound by 180-day increments, and children began school in kindergarten at age five. The steps for students to climb were established by adults who needed to account for and manage children. Student readiness did not have a significant impact on the system.

Multi-Age educators have recognised that children are individuals with different needs, backgrounds, learning styles, and personalities. They feel it is time to organise the structure of schools in order to provide opportunities for all children to grow and develop at their individual rates. They perceive a natural learning environment that calls for heterogeneous, Multi-Age groupings, within which other groupings may be created as needed.

Multi-Age groups usually include two or three consecutive grades with three to four age levels. This age range is necessary because children enter prep at diverse developmental stages. An increase in the number of low birth weight babies, poverty, and divorce, as well as other changing demographics of our society, contribute to this diversity. Multi-Age settings more readily accommodate learning variables, allowing students who are ready to proceed, an opportunity for rapid acceleration, while others who need more time are able to develop at their individual rates.



Emphasis Is Focused on Individual Rate of Progress

Since Multi-Age does not emphasise or spotlight a child's grade level, it can be contrasted to composite programs where students of usually two ages are combined but taught separately in the same classroom at their traditional grade levels. Composite programs, which are often created to manage class size issues, do not have a core Multi-Age belief, are usually not multi-year classes, and do not focus on continuous progress. A continuous progress curriculum allows children to move on as rapidly as they master content or to repeat content in different ways to gain better understanding.

What Is Multi-Age?

Multi-Age Programs Are . . .	Multi-Age Programs Are Not . . .
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• developmentally appropriate strategies.• heterogeneous communities of learners.• supportive of continuous learning.• based on emotional, social, intellectual, and physical growth.• providing integrated learning activities.• promoting active student involvement.• using a wide range of materials.• implementing authentic assessments.• involving teachers as co-learners and facilitators.• child-centred.• promoting teamwork and diversity.• renewing energy and support for education.• supportive and nurturing environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “lock-step” systems with little regard for student interests.• based on rigid groupings.• time-based know and recall.• based solely on intellectual learning.• isolated learning of subjects and tests.• forcing students to “bear with it.”• primarily written tasks.• drill and test method of education.• directed by a teacher as an authoritarian and know-it-all.• teacher centred.• designed to promote isolation and conformation.• producing students who become burned out and frustrated with education.• environments with fear of failure.