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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this book is to assist teachers who are working in multi-age classrooms. This includes teachers who are planning to begin multi-age assignments and those who have recently begun working in multi-age settings, as well as teachers who have been working in multi-age classrooms over the years. The emphasis is on classrooms that combine either years one and two or prep and years one and two. Many of the suggestions will also work for P-3 combinations and 1-3 combinations.

Teachers Have Concerns

Many teachers face school reorganisation with concern. Successful teachers worry that good methods will be discarded. New teachers wonder if they can handle the demands of a multi-age setting.

It is hoped this book will help teachers answer questions like these:

How do I teach two or more year levels at the same time?

What kinds of records do administrators want?

Will the principal think my ability to manage behaviour is poor if the classroom is noisy?

Can students do well on tests without workbooks and worksheets?

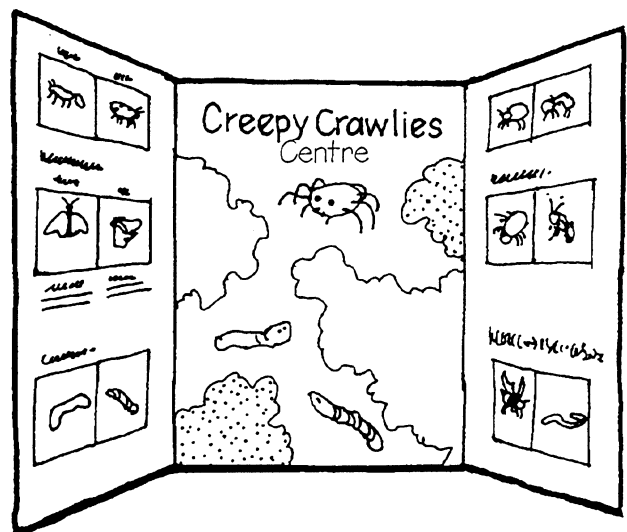
There is no single right answer to these questions; there are many right answers. Use the Table of Contents (pages 2-3) to look for topics, such as English, maths, behaviour management, and assessment, so that you can tackle your concerns one at a time. Choose one or two new strategies to try each week. Do not automatically abandon successful methods. You may choose to retain many of your own ideas if they produce good results. At the same time, be open to change. Some methods that sound unusual often produce excellent results.

New Ideas and Strategies

Although this book focuses on providing information about multi-age classrooms, it also touches on a variety of other ideas and strategies, such as those listed below. Some of these may be new to you.

- Whole language
- Integrated curriculum
- Cross-age tutoring
- Developmentally appropriate practices
- Portfolio assessment
- Centre-based instruction

These innovations can and do exist outside the multi-age setting. Even though multi-age programs can begin without most of them, instruction in this type of classroom is most effective when these ideas and strategies are incorporated.



Understanding the Multi-Age Classroom

What Is a Multi-Age Classroom?

Games are everywhere, both the commercial kind and the educational variety. Learning centres and work stations are in the process of being renamed. Their new title may be blended curriculum environments. Developing specific instructional strategies and materials for multi-age classrooms should be a high priority. Some of this has already been accomplished with the application of whole language and integrated curriculum materials. There is an increasing emphasis on computers and technology just as there is in every other part of the world. Busy work is cut to a minimum or eliminated altogether.

Most multi-age classrooms focus on activities that are developmentally appropriate. Teachers who have not focused on these may need to refocus their thinking. Students age six through eight were expected to fit themselves to the school, rather than having the school accommodate the needs of the children. Multi-age classrooms feature learning centres, open time, sustained silent reading, varied room arrangements, co-operative learning, thematic learning, maths manipulatives, and whole language tend to be child friendly.

Parents may not understand an unfamiliar type of education, and gaining their support will require the constant collective effort of teachers, administrators, and school boards. As teacher-parent communications and student reports evolve, every effort must be made to develop efficient, streamlined record keeping and reporting to prevent teachers from becoming overwhelmed by the paperwork.

Where Did Multi-Age Education Originate?

Multi-age education was very popular and widespread in the British Infant Schools almost thirty years ago. The English put their young children in large rooms combining five-, six-, and seven-year-olds. Their methods were those of a laboratory school. The rooms were full of projects, explorations, and experiments created by students and guided by teachers. By Australian standards these classrooms seemed extremely messy and noisy. In each class, the oldest children acted as tutors and leaders part of the time in an attempt to free the teacher so he or she could spend more time with individual students and carefully guide the small number of children who were just beginning to read. Children had an extreme amount of freedom. However, along with that, they also had an immense responsibility for their own learning.

Does Multi-Age Education Work?

Multi-age education does work. Today there are many adults in England who once attended multi-age classes who are now working at highly technical jobs. There are also thousands of people in Australia who were educated in multi-age classrooms.