

DR. STIRLING MCDOWELL
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RESEARCH INTO TEACHING



**TEACHING AND LEARNING
RESEARCH EXCHANGE**

Multi-Age Teaching

Westmount Community School Staff

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Introduction

The staff of Westmount Community School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan conducted a two-year action research project that explored the school as a multi-aged setting for teaching and learning. There was some staff turnover during the project, and it was decided to document separately what happened at the end of each year. As a result, this report contains two separate year-end reports. The first one, entitled “Teaching Strategies in a Multi-Age Setting” was submitted in September, 2001, and describes the staff’s first year of research on multi-aging. The second year-end report is entitled “Multi-Age Teaching – Best Practices” and provides perspectives on the project as it continued into the spring of 2002. The staff members involved in the project included:

Angela Antosh	Brenda Gilchrist	Shauna Barss	Bernice Cook-Laliberte
Krista Ford	George Rozdilsky	Candace Ahmed	David Seamer
Jane Macleod	Sharon Laliberte	Lisa Fleming	Shirley Hammer
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YEAR ONE

Teaching Strategies In A Multi-Age Setting

Westmount Community School is a Kindergarten to Grade 8 elementary school that houses approximately 190 students and 30 staff. It is located in an inner-city neighbourhood in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and is part of the Saskatoon Public School Division. The school has been designated a community school on the basis of the percentage of Aboriginal students in attendance and the low socio-economic status of families in the area. With the community school designation have come challenges. Poverty and cultural differences characterize the population served by the school and permeate into the classroom. Typically, the students are transient, and this likely contributes to the low academic skills that some of them have. Many students come to school without the basic skills necessary to be successful at school.

BACKGROUND

The staff at Westmount Community School have consistently sought to provide the best instructional and contextual framework for the students they serve. In 1995, staff members investigated ways of grouping students that would better serve their social and learning needs. Part of the reason for this investigation was the lack of social and academic success that the students were experiencing within the current forms of school organization. As a result, the students were organized into family groupings.

The structural framework for family groupings involved a subdivision of the student population into three families: Primary, Intermediate and Senior. Students were assigned to mixed age levels within each family, with the members of biological families often clustered together within the school families. Kindergarten was kept as a separate grouping. The concept of 'family' was used as an alternative to grade designations so that students would not feel threatened or discouraged by their grouping and could be supported by other members of their own biological families. Generally, social benefits were observed from this structural framework, although teachers consistently struggled with instructional strategies, curriculum integrity, and assessment and evaluation of student learning in such a multi-age context.

During the winter and spring of 1999, the staff began to investigate multi-age groups further in order to determine whether or not such groupings aligned with their beliefs and values regarding teaching and learning. The dialogue and study were on-going. However, the fall of 1999 brought many new staff members into the school, and the student groupings began to look more like combined grades even though the school continued to espouse a multi-age philosophy. As a result, it was proposed that the staff either embrace the multi-age concept whole-heartedly or go back to 'grade' designations. With leadership from the school-based professional development committee, the staff researched, reviewed, and shared current literature about multi-age teaching. One day was also

spent guiding the staff members through an articulation and discussion of their beliefs about learning and teaching, as well as the benefits and challenges of teaching within multi-age structures.

The staff also received funding through the Saskatoon Public School Division to visit schools in Calgary that were using multi-age organizations. The purpose of the trip was to observe and dialogue with colleagues about student and instructional organization in a multi-age setting.

The step leading to the research proposal to the McDowell Foundation was the process by which staff members formulated their beliefs as basic principles to guide multi-age groupings at Westmount Community School (see Appendix 1). This process led to commitment to multi-aging and the staff's own beliefs that successful teaching and learning pointed them in this direction. Consensus was reached that the whole school staff would support these principles wholeheartedly for two years as part of a McDowell Foundation action research project. The staff recognized that financial support would be required to ensure that they were able to carry out such vital processes as common curricular planning, team teaching, continued professional development, and the location of material resources. The need for financial assistance led to the initial application for funding to the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation, and the staff greatly appreciated the generous support provided by the Foundation, which has allowed them to pursue 'best instructional practices'.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The age-graded organizational structures that dominate schooling in North America are based on the following three assumptions (Miller, 1995):

1. Students of the same age are ready to learn the same things.
2. Students require the same amount of time to master certain learnings.
3. Students can master objectives for a grade level in all curriculum areas at the same time.

Experience has shown that such assumptions are erroneous and promote failure. Research has indicated that single-age or single-grade classrooms yield no benefits over multi-age groups. In fact, multi-age grouping can provide benefits for students, particularly in the affective domain (Black, 1993; JeanRoy, 1996; McIntyre et al., 1996; Miller, 1995; Pavan, 1992; Tait, 1992). Less studied and documented are the effects of multi-aging on academic performance. However, studies by Pavan (1992) and JeanRoy (1996) did find that students in multi-age groups performed as well or better than students from graded programs on standardized achievement tests. Students of lower socioeconomic status also showed greater academic achievement in multi-age schools in Pavan's study.

Multi-aging is more than restructuring. It implies pedagogical changes. Slavin states, "Non-graded organization can contribute to instructional effectiveness, but

the curriculum and instructional methods used within a non-graded framework are as important as the school organization plan in determining the ultimate effects” (1992, p.24). A multi-age philosophy also requires teachers who are comfortable with mixed-age classes and who believe that students learn by being active, thoughtful and reflective (Black, 1993; Gomolchuk and Piland, 1995). Effort is needed to move teaching away from an emphasis on ‘covering curriculum’ to one of helping students to learn. Teachers must be flexible in a multi-age setting (Black, 1993). Teachers of multi-age groups often plan weekly lessons together as well as determine two-year cycles for themes or units of study. Thoroughness of planning is crucial, making it essential for schools to provide extensive time for teachers to meet and plan together (Lolli, 1997). The team teaching concept, although not required, often adds a valuable dimension to multi-age grouping that cannot be replicated. In a self-contained class, team teaching provides two sets of hands and eyes working with children (Lolli, 1997). Staff development for teachers must be offered on an ongoing basis, and it is essential that teachers are supporting other teachers (Lolli, 1997).

Less information was obtainable from the literature about teaching strategies and assessment protocols for use in a multi-age setting. Sandra Stone (1995) identifies the following instructional elements as critical to successful teaching in such an environment:

- A process approach to learning
- The teacher as facilitator of learning
- An integrated curriculum
- An appropriate learning environment, using the center and/or project approach to allow student involvement in active, hands-on learning
- Cross-age learning using strategies such as cooperative learning groups and peer tutoring
- Flexible groupings
- Portfolio assessment

It is also essential to note the critical importance of community and parental involvement and support (Lolli, 1997; Miller, 1996).

A key point made in the literature is that multi-age organization and teaching require a lot of time, professional development, and teaching resources.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

Question: How do teachers identify and develop innovative teaching strategies in a multi-age setting in an inner city elementary school?

Objectives: To investigate, develop and experiment with a variety of teaching strategies in a multi-age setting over a two year period.

To work in teaching teams, over a two year period, to assess existing curricula for instruction in a multi-age setting.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the 2000-2001 school year, students at Westmount School were grouped as follows:

- Kindergarten (a.m. and p.m.)
- Grades One/Two (ages 6 and 7)
- Grades Three/Four/Five (ages 8, 9 and 10+)
- Grades Six/Seven/Eight (ages 11, 12 and 13+)

Within these student groupings, the following teaching teams were assigned:

- Kindergarten – 1 teacher
- Grades One/Two – 2 teachers
- Grades Three/Four/Five – 3 teachers
- Grades Six/Seven/Eight – 2 teachers

In addition, a resource teacher, a teacher librarian, a music teacher, a physical education teacher and teacher associates were part of the teaching and support staff. The kindergarten and primary teachers also worked with a Cree language teacher.

Teaching teams were to follow a common timetable, use shared release time for reflection and planning, and utilize integrated thematic units of study. Teachers also made an effort to develop a rotating curriculum over the course of the two-year project in order to ensure curricular integrity. Alternate student groupings were to be used as needed to meet individual student needs related to the development of particular skills.

Throughout the various units of study, teachers were to employ a variety of teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles and determine which strategies were most conducive for use within a multi-age setting. Methods of assessing learning were also to be investigated. (A web and list of lessons/resources for Grades 3, 4, and 5 are included in this report as Appendix 3).

The research committee consisted of all administrative and teaching staff. This committee met at least every two weeks to discuss the staff's joys, concerns and ongoing plans. In addition, staff members completed personal reflection sheets, were interviewed, and completed two surveys (one on their initial attitudes and perceptions at the beginning of the project and a year-end survey that asked them to summarize their observations about the project and generate recommendations for the future). Student feedback at all age levels was sought through focussed discussion groups, using a survey similar in format to the one used with staff to prompt discussion. Parental feedback was sought through a school newsletter and at parent advisory meetings.

FEEDBACK ON MULTI-AGING FROM PARENTS, STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

PARENT FEEDBACK

Although information from parents was sought formally through a school newsletter and at advisory council meetings, very few responses were obtained. Those obtained through the newsletter, although positive, lacked specificity. Parents simply indicated that they liked how things were being done at Westmount School. The same kind of responses came from those few parents who attended advisory council meetings.

The staff grappled with how to involve parents more actively in the project. One element that was recognized as lacking was the education of the parents in what 'multi-aging' involved when applied to the instruction provided at Westmount Community School.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Partway through the school year, a new teacher-researcher was asked to join in the effort of gathering and analyzing data related to multi-age teaching in the school. It was thought that this researcher would bring an "outside" perspective that would ensure there was no bias in reporting what was being learned. Although she was part of the school staff, she was not directly involved in the action research because she worked within a designated program serving special needs students throughout the division.

At a meeting early in February, she noted that students had not yet been directly involved in feedback about the multi-aging structures and strategies that were being used to teach them. Following this observation, she designed and implemented a series of focus group discussions with representatives from each of the three instructional families at Westmount School.

The focus groups followed a survey format but the discussions were carried out in a small group setting so the researcher could explain multi-age teaching strategies, using examples to clarify them. Comments from the focus group members, especially the primary students, were recorded by the researcher. Students were randomly selected from the families within the school for inclusion in the groups. To make the selections, teachers were asked to use the student registers for each grade (students are still organized on registers in this fashion), then count down a specific number on their registers to select the students for the focus groups. This sampling method provided eight students from each of the primary and senior families and nine students from the intermediate family. Since the intermediate family involved three classrooms each with students whose ages covered a three-year span, a slightly larger sample size was required for this age group. Feedback was collected from the students about the Learning Environment, Instructional Strategies and Learning Styles. The results of the discussions are highlighted below:

1. Working at Tables

Tables were used in place of desks in both the primary and intermediate groupings. The use of tables was favored by the primary students, who indicated that they liked to sit with their friends. Intermediate students indicated that you can share more at tables, but too much talking and copying goes on. They also liked to have a place to put their own things where they were easy to access. Although the senior students had desks during this year, a majority of those in the discussion group indicated that they would like to try tables. They, too, expressed concerns that were similar to those of the intermediate students, but they saw helping others in table groups as a positive outcome.

2. Different Age Groups Working Together

Students were asked how they felt about different age groups working together. Primary and senior students responded favorably, while the majority of intermediate students weren't sure. Positive comments included a desire in the older students to help younger students and be good role models for them. Some older students felt that perhaps there was more arguing and fighting with younger students and that they are more whiny and noisy.

3. Working with Other Classes in the Family Grouping

In addition to working in mixed age groups, students were also asked for their views about instruction with others classes within their own family cluster. Again, the primary and senior groups were very positive about working together because they felt that it was a good way of meeting new friends, getting to interact with more children the same age, and learning from more people. Students from the intermediate family were accepting of working with others, but they were concerned that they would not be familiar with the way other groups operated. They acknowledged how useful and desirable it had been to have whole group meetings earlier in the school year.

4. Having the Same Teacher for Two or More Years

When asked for their reaction to having the same teacher for two or more years, the primary and senior students gave an overwhelmingly positive reaction. The intermediate group was somewhat uncertain, but acknowledged the importance of establishing student-teacher trust and familiarity with routines and expectations. The senior students pointed out that there could be drawbacks to having the same teacher for two or more years if the teacher was bossy, mean or boring. Also, if some students were too friendly with their teacher, they could monopolize all of the teacher's time.

5. Learning with Themes

The next part of the discussion dealt with structuring learning activities according to themes. The primary students indicated that they were very fond of themes because 'you learn a lot about something'. The intermediate group was equally split between positive, neutral and negative feelings about this approach. They, too, agreed that 'you could learn more stuff' but felt that it could be boring if the chosen theme wasn't interesting. The senior students were primarily

positive or neutral about themes. Their responses reflected those of the other two groups.

6. Working in Skill Groups

Students were asked about skill groupings, which were put in place where they were needed and were already operating at the school as part of the Literacy/Numeracy Project. The primary and intermediate students took a highly favorable view of skill groupings because they helped students to learn the things they needed to learn. However, the intermediate students noted that skill groupings did not allow students to get and give help among themselves. The senior students were a little more concerned about the use of skill groups. Even though they recognized the groupings were helpful in improving specific student skills, they felt that there was a stigma attached to the students in the lower level groups.

7. Learning in Cooperative Groups

Cooperative group learning strategies were explained in detail to the students and the key elements of these strategies were emphasized. The primary and senior students were, for the most part, favorable toward their use. The intermediate students, on the other hand, viewed them negatively a large part of the time. The majority of intermediate students felt that they could learn easily on their own and found it problematic to be involved in disagreements on how to do things. The seniors articulated some problems with cooperative group learning as well, e.g., at times people in the group were not doing their jobs, but they recognized that each student learns better with input and help from others.

8. Learning through Role Plays, Simulations and Games

Role plays, simulations and games, used alone or in any combination, were viewed favorably by all groups because they were fun, they helped the students understand better, they were useful in real life, and they involved cooperation and movement. One student also felt that they reduced shyness.

9. Learning through Experiments

Learning through discovery and inquiry was also viewed favorably by all groups. The reasons that they gave for this favorable reaction included the view that experiments are fun, they help students find out things on their own, and they help students to remember things better and learn more. A few senior students also indicated that this type of learning can help you discover things in a safe setting, so that you don't get hurt trying things out on your own. They also recognized that it took greater effort for them to carry out some learning tasks on their own.

10. The Ways the Students Learn Best

All three groups were asked for information about the ways they felt that they learned best. In response, the primary students talked about listening, teaching others, math, and reading. Several of them also drew play scenes on their response sheets. The intermediate students felt that they learned best by having fun, which included going on field trips, seeing and hearing things,

themes (despite the negative responses that this group gave earlier to learning by themes), doing things, role playing/acting, playing games, and experiments. The senior students indicated that their learning was enhanced by doing things, writing notes, listening to Elders, watching others, trying new things, listening, working with their hands, science, and math.

11. Preparing Students for High School

The senior students were asked an additional question about the way that their teachers could best prepare them for high school. Their suggestions included visits to high schools, opportunities to talk to high school students, and opportunities to observe the instruction of high school students. The students felt that they should have substantial exposure to high school curriculum.

Recognizing that the number of students in the focus groups was small in comparison to the total student population, the researcher who led the discussions had some doubts about the representativeness of the responses she had obtained. As a result, the teachers in the school were encouraged to go back to the larger family groupings and test the focus group responses to see if they were, in fact, representative. No additional feedback came from any such checks that were carried out.

TEACHER FEEDBACK

As previously indicated, feedback about multi-aging was collected from the teachers in the school through surveys, discussions, journals, and interviews. After four months, information that had been collected from the teachers' journal reflections and an initial survey on the teachers' attitudes and perceptions was summarized for the January Interim Report submitted to the McDowell Foundation. At this time, intermediate and senior teachers were reporting instructional success in their multi-age settings. Their students were experiencing good growth, particularly in social development, through the use of many child-centered strategies, such as peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and self-management techniques (e.g., Control Theory). Primary teachers were also reporting good social growth in their students, but they repeatedly expressed concerns about whether or not their students' academic needs were being met, particularly the needs of their weaker grade one students. These teachers were and remained strong proponents of a self-contained 'readiness' class for these students. The teachers' responses closely matched their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions upon entering the project. Their needs in terms of project support are highlighted in Appendix 2 and show their repeated emphasis on time, money and resources. Support with student evaluation was also requested, as well as a more tangible method of assessing whether multi-aging has advantages over single-graded classes, where child-centered instructional strategies may also prevail.

A more detailed summary of the teachers' reflections was compiled at year-end and is given below. All staff received a survey that was divided into three sections. One section dealt with the teaching/learning environment, the second dealt with instructional planning and strategies, and the third asked questions about teachers' experiences in conducting the project. Responses were received from all professional school-based staff and included twelve questionnaires in all.

The Teaching/Learning Environment

- In responding to the questions in this section, eight respondents judged their experience with different age groups working together to be positive, two respondents found it to be a negative experience, one respondent was neutral, and the response of one teacher was not applicable. Among the benefits that teachers saw in teaching multi-age groupings was the natural way that this way of organizing students lends itself to peer tutoring, cooperative group learning, the adaptation of curriculum to meet individual needs, and an emphasis on the process of 'how to learn'. One teacher felt that there needed to be a better balance of all age ranges than there was in his program, and one felt that the academic needs of younger students were harder to meet in this type of setting.
- Teachers were also asked about their experiences in teaching similar multi-age groups together. Seven of the responses were positive, one was neutral, two were not applicable, and two were not completed. Most teachers felt that the use of common themes made this process manageable. Moreover, the collaborative planning and teaching that took place led to motivating and creative lessons. Teaching similar multi-age groups together was also viewed as preparing senior students for the structure of high school.
- All staff felt that it was positive to teach the same group of students for two or more years. Most student discipline issues occurred with the more transient students. It was easy to begin teaching when the students already knew the teacher's expectations and the teacher, in turn, knew their abilities, learning styles, and personalities. It was also effective to continue a relationship with the same set of parents since a significant amount of time was required to develop trusting and mutually respectful relationships. It was also beneficial to track students' progress over a longer period than one year.
- The last question in this section involved the use of table groupings. Out of those family groupings that used tables for instruction, all but one staff member found them conducive to social and academic development. Most felt the table groupings fostered cooperation in carrying out learning tasks and therefore it led to greater learning and support for one another. The staff member who found the use of tables to be a negative experience worked with a large number of students who had behavior problems outside the classroom context. As a result, personal space was often desired by both student and teacher, and it was hard to achieve in this setting.

Instructional Planning And Strategies

- All teaching staff found planning with other teachers to be an extremely effective component of quality instruction. It led to greater depth, breadth and variety with units of study. It also saved some time in the preparation of lessons when others contributed to the work. It was noted that last minute scheduling changes caused significant planning problems. Unless it was carefully safeguarded, collaborative time with the teacher librarian and other support staff was sometimes affected. It was also noted that some staff members did not carry out their planning duties, and since teaching multi-age groupings was a cooperative group endeavor, this affected everyone and led to some resentment.

- Team teaching was also viewed as a positive experience by the majority of respondents, particularly when it involved everyone equally in the planning and teaching efforts. One teacher noted that when two adults are interacting positively with each other as a teaching team, clarifying and negotiating meaning, students benefit from their role-modeling of verbal problem-solving. Teacher learning is also facilitated by observing colleagues in action.
- All staff reported on the benefits of using themes to provide a context for learning. Teachers reported that the students were making 'connections' when activities and resources were related to one major idea because it was so easy to integrate all subject areas. Although themes were not school-wide, some teachers saw the possibilities of drawing the whole school community together in this manner.
- Skill groups were also viewed as necessary by the majority of respondents because they met learning needs that were very specific to individuals and small groups. However, some teachers cautioned against the segregation of students on the basis of ability/performance, which did not match the school's beliefs about students and their social/emotional needs.
- Cooperative learning strategies were also viewed positively by most respondents. These strategies do not limit or segregate students and can be very effective in the learning, practicing, and reinforcing of social skills. It was noted that there is inconsistency in the teaching and modeling of cooperative learning as a strategy, and that this needed to be rectified in the next school year. One senior family teacher indicated that she was having a difficult time motivating her students to work within a cooperative group framework with others who were outside of their immediate circle of friends.
- The use of role plays, simulations and games was also highly valued. Students found such activities highly motivating and less threatening than reading and writing as avenues for displaying their learning. Students appear to internalize learning better using these strategies. Several teachers indicated that they needed to use more of these strategies but had found that planning time was essential.
- Discovery and inquiry approaches received considerable recognition as teaching strategies as well. Teachers indicated that these approaches allow students to take charge of their learning and they also involve higher levels of critical thinking.

General Questions about the Project

- When asked about their greatest area of growth or learning while working in a multi-age setting, respondents indicated that they had learned to do the following:
 - work within the context of rotating curriculum for a span of grades
 - develop curriculum based on thematic instruction
 - use more manipulatives, simulations and discovery learning
 - work as a team with other staff, create integrated units with others

- appreciate the difficulties involved in teaching/managing a wide age range of students
 - understand that communication is key to making things work
 - read lots about multi-aging and tried many new things
 - dialogue a lot about what is most important to us as educators and as a team
- The second reflective question asked about the greatest area of uncertainty or disappointment working in a multi-age setting. Responses included: we still cling to the concept of 'grades'. Teachers, students and parents seem to place a value on these externally imposed labels; ensuring that students get all they need to develop building blocks for future concepts; getting everyone to be a part of the planning process and share the work load; we need a readiness class for grade one students; my students did not develop the internal locus of control that I had hoped; problems in scheduling prevented me from collaborating with others; how do we measure how we are doing?; we need evaluation tools that fit with multi-aging and curriculum expectations.
 - In terms of planning for year two of the project, staff were asked what could be done to continue the fostering of a collaborative teaching and learning environment. Respondents emphasized that new staff would need to be mentored by others. This mentoring would have to include an in-service session early in the school year that outlined how the project had developed thus far and what the staff had learned about multi-aging through readings, discussion, and observation. All teaching staff should spend time observing others teach using the strategies in which they felt most confident. It was noted that somehow teacher associates needed to be included in more planning and reflective practice activities. Also, all staff needed ongoing professional development in both multi-aging and different instructional strategies, and it was thought that perhaps the school division's instructional consultants could help with this professional development. Other suggestions included the use of school-wide themes and making sure that time for collaboration would be protected and continue to be available. In addition, the staff recognized a need to work collaboratively on defining and providing indicators to track student progress and report on student learning.
 - When asked about their greatest area of concern as they head into year two, staff members mentioned the need to help students cope with transitions between family groupings. The senior family teachers also hoped to obtain more support in the form of personnel to help them carry out their programs with the large number of students they typically had. One staff member indicated that she did not feel ready at this stage to mentor others new to the multi-age setting. Limitations, such as those imposed by room size, were also mentioned, noting that renovations are costly but sometimes critically important to good instruction.
 - The last question posed was how to expand our community of learning to involve parents and other community members. The following suggestions surfaced:
 - Room parents or family grouping parents would be in a better position than teachers to draw in more volunteers.
 - Since the education of others about multi-aging was seen as critical, the school might investigate the use of the community room solely for that purpose and not as a staff meeting place.

- Home visits were seen as highly successful this year, they should continue.
- More involvement of students with community events and more opportunities for students to volunteer would be useful.
- The school might support out-of-school and job-exploration projects.
- An Elder program could be sought.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT YEAR

The 2000-2001 school year was enlightening for both teachers and students at Westmount Community School. The experience of being both active practitioners and researchers allowed the staff to look at findings and experiences in the literature that related to multi-aging and then apply multi-aging and child-centered instructional strategies in our own school setting. Much of what the literature told us about the struggles and the benefits of multi-aging has held true. Yet there are many more questions that our research has raised. For example, does multi-aging fit with all age ranges? Do teachers' attitudes affect the outcomes of such studies? And so forth.

Having recognized the necessity of being reflective practitioners, the staff looked forward to the coming school year, which would be the second and final year of their McDowell project. Carried forward to the next year were the following considerations, which were formulated as recommendations to ourselves:

1. Mentoring of staff new to our school needs to be given immediate priority.
2. Ongoing professional development in multi-age structures and instructional strategies is essential.
3. Family representatives need to meet monthly to share and collaborate on curriculum coverage, instructional strategies, and special events.
4. Substitute teachers need to be selected carefully and supported during times of teacher collaboration, so that they can understand the nature of the school's instructional groups and manage them effectively.
5. It is vital that release time from regular teaching duties be safeguarded to ensure that enough time is allotted to the collaboration and planning needed for this project.
6. Instructional resources need to be evaluated and sought to meet instructional deficiencies that might exist.
7. The education of parents and other community members about the school's beliefs and practices have to be a priority.
8. A readiness class or some alternative should be considered in order to meet the needs of certain students for whom a regular multi-age program is not enough.

9. Senior family teachers need extra support if their class numbers remained high.
10. Staff need to make a commitment to attend necessary meetings on a regular basis.
11. Another teacher-researcher needs to be found since staff assignments have been altered.

*As we acquire more knowledge, things do not become
more comprehensible, but more mysterious.
- Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)*

YEAR TWO

Multi-Age Teaching – Best Practices

Clearly, switching to a multiage group involves more than just reshuffling kids. This time around, if schools take their time and start with a solid research foundation, there's a good chance multiage grouping will last.
- Susan Black

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year, some members of the Westmount Community School staff had been multi-aging since 1999-2000. During that time, a number of new staff members had come to the school and asked questions about multi-aging. Many hours were spent in research and discussions on this topic. As a result, staff made the decision to continue this way of teaching at Westmount School. It was on the basis of a two-year commitment to multi-aging that the staff had applied for a McDowell grant to look into strategies that would be helpful to teachers coming to multi-age classrooms.

As the final year of the project began, the research objectives were revised and expanded. It was agreed that the school's progress towards meeting them would be measured through surveys of parents, students, teachers, and teacher associates. In addition to gathering feedback from the surveys, a new literature review on multi-aging needed to be carried out in accordance with the project's revised objectives. Staff would also develop a list of assessment tools that have been documented and proven to be successful in a multi-age classroom.

REVISED RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

After the project began, the objectives listed in our original research proposal to the McDowell Foundation were continually discussed at research meetings. Over time these objectives began to expand and were redefined. Upon completion of the first year of the McDowell project, staff felt further research was warranted to address assessment and evaluation tools and teaching practices in multi-age classrooms. During the first year of the project, the primary family teachers had expressed a need to have a readiness class for students entering the school, and this need was also to be evaluated in the context of a multi-age setting in the second year. Another objective for the second year was to explore peer visitations and other forms of mentoring for teachers since the staff felt it would be beneficial for teachers to observe and learn from one another. These objectives for the project were reviewed, clearly defined and discussed with staff. At the beginning of 2001-2002, the project's objectives were:

- To focus on assessment practices (identify effective, appropriate and creative assessment techniques),

- To investigate whether single-grade classrooms for primary level students are more developmentally appropriate, particularly with respect to fostering the students' literacy and numeracy,
- To experiment with peer visitation, mentoring or coaching, and
- To explore accountability and effectiveness in a multi-age program in a community school.

CONTINUING LITERATURE REVIEW

As a community school, Westmount served a student population that was largely Aboriginal and had socio-economic disadvantages. Recognizing that many of these students were at risk of not succeeding at school and in life, the staff felt there was a need to continue reviewing the literature for information about multi-aging, particularly with respect to the project's current objectives, issues such as student transience and the ways that youth-at-risk might learn best in the context of multi-aging.

It was found that the literature supports the philosophy of multi-aging for a number of reasons. Multi-aging reflects real-life situations in which students work with peers at a variety of age levels; it has proven academic and social benefits; and it uses a constructivist approach to teaching strategies to support student learning (Brendtro et al, 1990; Mulcahy, 2000; Tomlinson, 1999; Lolli, 1997).

MULTI-AGING AND CHANGING SCHOOL CULTURE

There is strong evidence to support the use of multi-age classrooms in any school environment (McClay, 1996; SIDRU/SPDU, 1997; Mulcahy, 2000; Miller, 1996; Pavan, 1992). This evidence includes the positive use of multi-aging in small schools and schools serving families with socio-economic disadvantages. Multi-aging has been linked to one-room schoolhouses of earlier days (McClay, 1996; Black, 1993), and many educators believe this type of classroom is more conducive to the way children learn (Mulcahy, 2000; Miller, 1995). As well, for students in a multi-age classroom who cannot meet grade level expectations, the stigma of failing is removed (Black, 1993; McClay, 1996). It has also been documented that both academically and socially, children schooled in multi-age classrooms perform better or just as well on tests in comparison to grade-alike groups (McClay, 1996; Jeanroy, 1996). In support of multi-aging, McClay has indicated that "African American children, low socio-economic students, and underachievers benefit in a non-graded program" (1996, p. 6).

Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Brockern, 1990, have compared a traditional classroom with what they call a "Brain Friendly Learning" environment. They indicate that a traditional school:

. . . too often fragments learning into subject areas, substitutes control for the natural desire to learn, coops naturally active children for hours in assembly-line classroom structures and ignores both individual and cultural differences. It destroys opportunities for learning from elders, from each other and from new generations. (1990, p. 91)

According to these authors, a traditional classroom is in contrast to Brain Friendly learning, in which the student learning experience is *experiential, learning is best achieved when it is active, interesting and relevant and brain friendly learning is obtained, in part through cooperative learning* (1990, pp. 98-100). The writing of Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Brockern is oriented specifically to working with Aboriginal youth-at-risk. What they say about the way in which these students learn fits with the philosophy of multi-aging. Current research suggests that the strategies used in multi-age classrooms are more helpful to these students in supporting learning. These strategies include cooperative learning, constructivist methods, and process-oriented learning (Gomolchuk and Piland, 1995). Therefore, multi-aging can be implemented in schools with youth-at-risk to provide a brain friendly environment in which students may learn (Pavan, 1992; Clinton Kelly School, 1996).

EVALUATION

A misconception appears to exist that assessment in a multi-age setting is more difficult than in a graded setting (Lolli, 1997). Many tools for student assessment may be used successfully in either a multi-age classroom or a graded classroom. While assessment tools used in multi-age classrooms are not necessarily different than those used in a graded classroom, they do provide on-going and authentic evaluation of students. According to the literature, evaluation in a multi-age classroom is more authentic than in a graded classroom because it deals with evaluation of both social and academic progress and is supported by a long-term relationship between students and teachers (Lolli, 1997; SIDRU/SPDU, 1997). Assessment in a multi-age class is on-going, individualized, and carried out over the two to three years that the student and teacher are together (Lolli, 1997; Stone, 1994/95). Evaluation, then, is conducted on a continual basis, and the research has provided insight into the outcomes of this evaluation:

- In 1990, a significant difference was noted in affective measures, with students in multi-age classes outperforming the students in single-grade classes; and
- In 1990 and 1992, students in multi-age classes performed academically as well as their counterparts (McClary, 1996).
- These positive outcomes in assessments of students in multi-age classes are supported by Miller, 1996; Lolli, 1997; Jeanroy, 1996; Pavan, 1992; and Mulcahy, 2000.

The literature recommends a number of assessment tools for evaluation in a multi-age classroom, including:

- Portfolios
- Observation
- Anecdotal records
- Conferencing
- Student self-evaluation
- Videotaped samples
- Sample reading and writing
- Parental reflection
- Class meetings
- Student checklists (McClary, 1996; SIDRU/SPDU, 1997; Stone, 1994/95; Hobman, 1997)

As noted earlier, many of these tools may be used in graded as well as non-graded classrooms. The critical question is: How does one evaluate individual students, particularly those students who are not meeting grade level expectations but are making individual progress? The literature suggests that the current means of student reporting may need to be looked at and changed to reflect more of a continuum of student learning (Lolli, 1997).

PEER VISITATION/MENTORING

While the literature does not specifically address the topic of peer visitation, mentoring or coaching, it definitely supports professional development and a common understanding of the philosophy of multi-aging at all levels – school, parent, and community (Miller, 1996; Black, 1993).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

During the 2001-2002 school year, the students at Westmount School were grouped as follows:

- Kindergarten (a.m. and p.m.)
- Grade One
- Grade Two
- Grades Three/Four/Five
- Grades Six/Seven
- Grades Seven/Eight

The teaching teams for the purpose of the research were as follows:

- K-2 (Primary Family) – 3 teachers
- Grades Three/Four/Five (Intermediate Family) – 3 teachers
- Grades 6-8 (Senior Family) – 2 teachers

Even though the school staff had made a two-year commitment to the project in 2000, maternity leaves and a transfer request resulted in staff changes, with two new teachers coming to Westmount in the fall of 2001. The staff at the school also included a resource room teacher, teacher librarian, guitar teacher, two Cree language teachers and a number of teacher associates.

Teaching teams in the primary family were grouped together for research purposes and shared common themes. The intermediate family teachers followed a common timetable and worked closely together during the second year of a revolving curriculum. They also formed skill groups for literacy and numeracy, whereby students left their homerooms to attend the classrooms of other intermediate teachers. Senior teachers began the year with common themes but did not carry this strategy on throughout the year.

The committee spearheading the research consisted of the vice-principal, who was also a classroom teacher, and other classroom teachers. The committee met once a month as well as on two Saturdays during the school year. Many thorough discussions of multi-aging took place, many of them in terms of

what multi-aging meant to each group member and how it was working for those engaged in it.

SURVEY FINDINGS

At the end of the project, feedback on multi-aging was collected from teachers, teacher associates, and parents/guardians. The survey form used for this purpose was altered slightly to ask questions that were appropriate for each group. The survey forms are provided in Appendices 4-9 together with the results. A summary of the key points in the feedback provided by each group is provided below:

TEACHER SURVEY

The teacher survey was given only to the classroom teachers who formed the research committee. While this survey asked specific questions related to academic and social evaluation of students, its focus was on the multi-age program itself. In particular, the survey addressed the issue of whether or not the teachers had a good understanding of multi-aging. The survey responses showed a 50/50 split among the teachers. Those who used a multi-age process provided positive results while those who were not using such a process answered “maybe” or “don’t know” to many questions. The survey, therefore, suggests there was not a common understanding among the teachers on what multi-aging is and how effective it can be.

Teachers raised concerns about the transition problems of students and the perceived lack of structure in multi-age classrooms.

TEACHER ASSOCIATE SURVEY

Only three out of eight survey forms were received back from the teacher associate group. This lack of response may reflect the level of commitment to multi-aging and/or little understanding of the importance of their input for the purposes of the research. Nevertheless, the three responses received indicated that the teacher associates had several areas of concern. Two were concerned about behavior problems occurring within skills groups, and there was also some concern about possible injuries during Physical Education classes arising from the difference in the physical development of younger and older students.

STUDENT SURVEY

Intermediate family teachers surveyed students in their classrooms. The majority of students indicated that they learn best through process-oriented instruction. They also supported the practice of working with the same teacher for more than one year. The fact that a majority of students supported skill groups may indicate a misunderstanding. In response to the question about working with students from other intermediate family classes, many indicated “Don’t know” or “Don’t like”, even though these were students involved in the skill groups.

PARENT SURVEY

The information provided by the parent surveys needs to be interpreted with caution for two reasons. First, the primary teachers and one senior teacher were not engaged in multi-aging in terms of structuring their classrooms and organizing instruction. Second, the survey used with the intermediate family parents was different from the school-wide survey. The intermediate family teachers had surveyed the parents of their students prior to the school-wide survey being sent out, and some of the content was different. While the school-wide survey asked questions that evaluated the multi-age program, the questions in the intermediate family survey addressed the processes of multi-age teaching. A few questions require particular comment:

#5 – Do you prefer to have your child in a multi-age classroom (e.g. more than one grade) instead of a single-graded classroom?

	<u>Primary Family Parents</u>	<u>Senior Family Parents</u>
Strongly Disagree	4	1
Disagree	4	1
Agree	1	5
Strongly Agree	1	3
Don't Know	1	

This was likely not a legitimate question to ask parents who had students in the primary family who were not involved with multi-aging? These parents may never have had experience with multi-age classrooms and therefore their responses to the survey questions may not be based on knowledge. Using hindsight, it might have been better to rephrase question #4 in the primary family survey, given the results:

#4 – Do you have a child in a multi-age classroom at Westmount Community School?

Yes – 1 No – 13 Don't Know – 1

Perhaps the question that should have been asked is: Have you had any experiences with multi-aging? Those parents who had no experiences with multi-aging should not have continued the survey.

Overall, however, most parents either agreed with multi-age teaching or didn't know what it was.

LIMITATIONS AND PROBLEMS

The research committee recognized that the teachers at Westmount School were not in a position to provide specific academic and social evaluations of their students for the purpose of assessing the impact of multi-aging. To be meaningful, such evaluations would have had to be compared to similar evaluations in single-grade classrooms in order to establish the differences and similarities in the impact of the two strategies. This inability to be definitive about the results of the school's experimentation with multi-aging was discussed, and it was agreed that the indicator of the results of multi-aging would be subjective, namely the perspectives provided by the staff, students and parents who had experienced multi-aging during the project at Westmount School.

The dual role of the teacher-researcher was also an area of concern to the research committee. The team discussed whether or not to hire a researcher/writer for the project because it recognized this role was time-consuming and demanding. A decision was made that the writing could be done by the research group. However, when it came time to do the writing of the research reports, it was difficult to get a commitment to this process from group members.

CONCLUSIONS

IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Brockern (1990) discuss the importance of relationships in their book *Reclaiming Youth-at-Risk*. In particular they mention:

- peer groups
- staff teamwork
- teamwork/parents
- leadership groups

In order for an initiative such as multi-aging to be successful, all of the above need to be in place. Communication between all of the parties involved should be open, honest, and respectful.

COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF MULTI-AGING

Gomolchuk and Piland indicate that "teachers with more positive attitudes toward multiage classrooms had more positive perceptions of how well students perform academically and socially in multiage classes than did respondents with less positive attitudes toward multiage classes" (1995, p. 31). Since attitudes towards multi-aging affect perceptions of student performance, it is critical to the success of any multi-age program that the staff who are implementing it have a common understanding of what multi-aging is and what it would look like

when implemented in the classroom (Lolli, 1997). As one teacher wrote:

I think it is very important for all members of the staff to have a common vision, no matter what the undertaking is. With a common vision it is easier for all – students being the primary focus.

Information taken from the survey of teachers indicated that a third of the teachers at Westmount School did not have a clear picture of multi-aging, could not provide a purpose for it, and did not multi-age in their classrooms. In spite of the research and discussions about multi-aging among the staff, a common understanding was not developed within the staff as a whole.

COMMITMENT TO MULTI-AGING

As important as a common understanding is, so too is staff commitment. It is vital for a multi-aging program to have commitment and participation from all staff as well as strong administrative support (Mulcahy, 2000). The research project at Westmount did not enjoy the continuous involvement of all key staff members. The commitment to multi-age instruction needs to start with the decisions about staffing at the school (Gomolchuk and Piland, 1995). Potential new staff members should be made aware of initiatives of this kind when they are being hired for or transferred to a position in the school (SIPDU/SPDU, 1997). In that way, they are in a position to decide whether or not they want to participate in the research or accept the philosophy behind the initiative (Jeanroy, 1996).

There also needs to be a commitment to professional development among the staff. Learning about multi-aging needs to be seen as both a group responsibility and an individual responsibility (Black, 1993; Lolli, 1997). As a teacher associate wrote in her survey response, “multi-aging is a very different concept from the norm and most people don’t like change, especially to that extreme.” Changes in the culture of the school take on-going professional development.

PARENTAL SUPPORT

As critical as staff support is to implement change, so too is parental support (Miller, 1996; Jeanroy, 1996; Mulcahy, 2000). The parents at Westmount School had been invited in for discussions on the philosophy of multi-aging through a newsletter. However, no parents attended. Sending out the invitation through a newsletter did not work. As a result, among the recommendations in the year-end report for the first year of the project was one that underlined the need to find ways of involving parents in the school’s multi-aging initiative. This recommendation was not successfully addressed in the second year either, although the survey of parents in 2001-2002 indicated that there was support for multi-aging among the parents at Westmount. Since the literature on multi-aging stresses the importance of parental involvement in multi-age schools, this issue needs further attention. Perhaps starting discussions about multi-aging with a small group of parents would be more effective. After this group built an understanding of multi-aging, its members could act as liaisons with other parents and the community members (Clinton Kelly School, 1996).

ATTENTION TO TRANSITIONS

Concern was expressed in the survey responses over transition times for intermediate family students. It was suggested that the transition to skill groupings gave these students the opportunity to misbehave. It was also mentioned that teaching time was lost in trying to settle students down after the transition. Although there was support for multi-aging in the student survey, the students, too, did not like the classroom changes. Therefore, the area of transitions needs to be discussed by all staff prior to the implementation of multi-aging.

It is important to add that skill-grouping in the intermediate family was organized in order to provide teacher associate support for literacy and numeracy education, and it is not a strategy specific to multi-aging. The behavior problems that were a concern for students and teacher associates did not arise because of multi-aging. In fact, the literature supports the view that behavior problems can decrease when students work in a multi-age environment due to the nature of the active learning environment. (Tait, 1991/92; Jeanroy, 1996; McClay, 1996).

CONCERNS ABOUT STRUCTURE

A final concern raised in the survey responses was a perceived lack of structure with multi-age classrooms. The literature indicates that there is a misconception that multi-age classrooms are unstructured (Lolli, 1997). The classroom could appear to be unstructured because of the teaching and learning strategies being used. For example, cooperative learning and experiential learning allow students to assume more responsibility for their own learning and the teaching of others (Stone, 1994/95). This concern may speak to parental and teacher experiences of a multi-age classrooms and what they look like.

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Appendix 1

Basic Principles of Multi-Age Grouping at Westmount Community School

1. Whole Child Oriented

2. Relationship Building

- Two-year age or grade span
- Collaborative team based approach
- Total staff involvement

3. Team Teaching

- Common planning and time tabling
- Commitment to regular, weekly team meetings

4. Curriculum Delivery

- Thematic, integrated approach
- Variety of teaching strategies
- Rotating curriculum
- Skill or cocoon grouping when appropriate
- Variety of assessment tools
- Process orientation

5. Community Involvement when possible

6. Developmental Orientation

- On-going discussion of vision, beliefs and professional development
- Conscious effort to maintain clear and consistent communication among all staff and community

Appendix 2

Support for Teachers Who Teach in Multi-Age Settings

The staff at Westmount Community School identified the following as things that they needed to start multi-aging and carry out it successfully over the year. The list is based primarily on the survey forms that staff members handed in. The items in the list are grouped according to the kind of support that is needed, either emotional or financial.

Emotional Support

- Feeling comfortable enough to say, “No, I can’t take on any more”
- Laughter
- Strong, supportive leadership
- Committed staff
- Understanding of colleagues
- Flexibility
- Organization
- Trust among staff so individuals can be honest and open in a respectful manner
- TIME

Financial Support

- TIME
- More books and supplies
- Time to plan with teachers and teacher associates
- Items for centre time
- Resources and materials
- Information on learning centres at the intermediate level
- Small rug
- Update on Monty’s program with Jane/Brenda
- Money for experience trips and supplies
- Teacher associate support with the senior family or smaller classes
- Time to meet with staff
- Development of a detailed time line

Appendix 3

Creating Thematic Units – Some Suggestions (Intermediate Level)

For information on these suggestions, please feel free to contact Val Tataryn, George Rozdilsky or Angela Antosh, who are all teachers in Saskatoon Public School Division.

The Thematic Units listed below have curriculum connections in Grades 3, 4, and 5 and have been used successfully in multi-age classrooms.

Theme – Identity

- Communities
- Saskatchewan
- Canada

Theme – Winter Celebrations

- Communities Around the World
- Multicultural Traditions
- Learning About the Past – Point of View

Something Different

Theme – Shoot for the Stars

- Shakespeare
- Newspapers
- Data Management and Analysis
- Astronomy

Appendix 4

Sample Web and List of Lessons/Resources on Friendship (Grades 3, 4, 5)

FRIENDSHIP

A SAMPLE THEMATIC UNIT FOR A MULTI-AGING

The following sample was developed jointly by Angela Antosh, Val Tataryn and George Rozdilsky to as part of their effort to instruct students in a multi-age setting. If further information is needed, they may be contacted through the Saskatoon Public School Division.

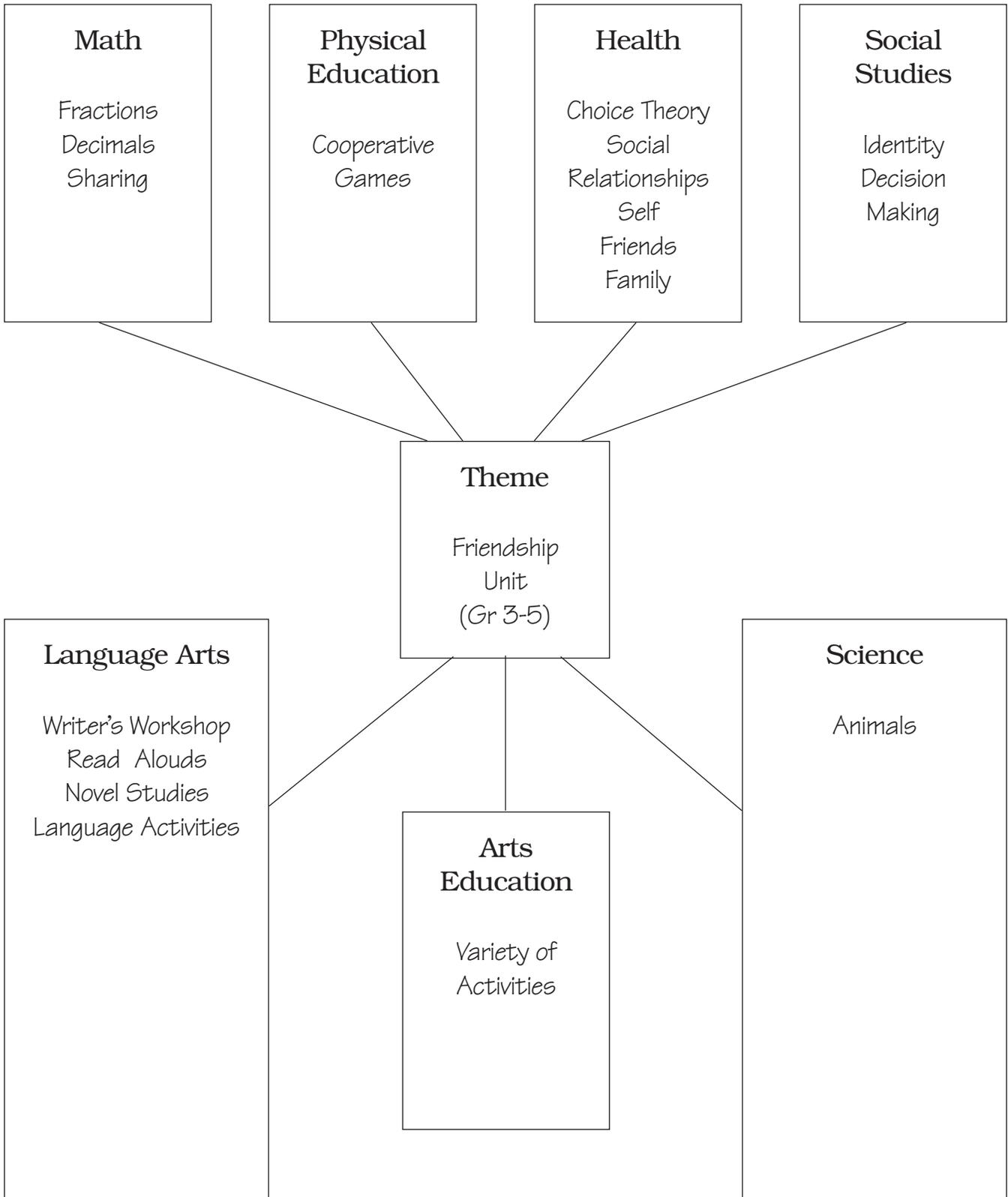
MULTI-AGE PHILOSOPHY

The following sample has been developed for a multi-age classroom setting, particularly Grades 3, 4, 5.

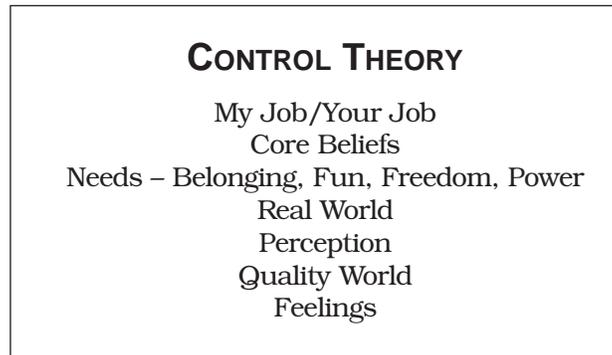
Multi-age grouping is the grouping together of students of more than one age and ability level to find the greatest benefit of interaction among them. Children learn at their own pace within a supportive, challenging environment that encourages growth and development without fear of failure. Research has indicated that students in a multi-age classroom environment are able to develop their cooperative learning skills more successfully. This environment provides opportunities such as cooperative learning, skill development to meet future employment needs, taking on the roles of both teacher and learner, active participation for students in their own learning, avenues for all students to demonstrate leadership, and the promotion of self-esteem.

When implementing a unit of study in a multi-age classroom, a variety of assessment tools can be utilized, keeping in mind that children will be assessed according to their developmental level. Because self-evaluation is an important part of how children learn within a multi-age classroom, a rubric can be developed by the students with the guidance of the teacher. Some assessment suggestions are provided with the unit along with a sample rubric. Students and teachers can then use the criteria outlined in the rubric to assess their work on a daily basis. It is also important to provide students with time for self-reflection.

Planning for Instruction – Integrated Planning Sheet



Part One – Internal Control/Choice Theory



RESOURCES

Anderson, Judy. (1996). *Social Contract – What We Believe*. Chelsom Consultants Limited: Canada.

Glasser, Carleen. (1998). *The Quality World Activity Set*.

Glasser, William. (1990). *Quality Schools: Managing Students without Coercion*. Perrenial: New York.

Gossen, Diane. (1996). *Why People Behave*. Chelsom Consultants Limited: Canada.

Gossen, Diane. (2000). *Why I Do What I Do*. Chelsom Consultants Limited: Canada.

Saskatchewan Education. (1998). *Health Curriculum Guide for Grades 1-5*.

Saskatchewan Education. (June, 1995). *Elementary Social Studies Curriculum Guide Grades 3,4,5*.

Schmidt, Fran and Alice Friedman. (1991). *Creative Conflict Solving For Kids*. Grace Contrino Abrams Peace Education, Inc.: Miami Beach, Florida.

Smith, Glenn and Kathy Tomberlin. (1997). *Quality Time for Quality Kids*. New View Publications, Inc.: Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Note: There are also many picture books that can be used with this portion of the unit.

FOUNDATIONAL OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this portion of the thematic unit “Friendship” is to introduce students to the techniques of Choice Theory. As students become more familiar with the language and mechanics of Choice Theory, they will be able to recognize they do have internal choices in their lives. Choice Theory is a problem-solving technique as well as a self-evaluative tool in which one strives to be the person he/she would like to be. All activities in the unit are geared toward developing and enhancing this technique in order for students to internalize the value in making good choices throughout their lifetime.

The unit is taught with the 1998 Saskatchewan Education Health Curriculum Foundational Objectives listed below. Students will:

KNOWLEDGE

- Recognize the need for healthy personal relationships with members of their family, friends, and others in the community
- Gradually incorporate the vocabulary for expressing feelings and for social interaction into their talking and writing

SKILLS AND HABITS

- Develop their interpersonal skills
- Develop their intrapersonal skills
- Increasingly accept responsibility for themselves and others
- Develop conflict resolution skills
- Demonstrate respect for all people regardless of their race, gender, age, abilities, etc.

ATTITUDES AND VALUES

- Have confidence in their own feelings
- Work toward improving their self-esteem
- Have confidence in their ability to make decisions

COMMON ESSENTIAL LEARNINGS (CELS)

- Personal and Social Values and Skills
- Communications
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Independent Learning

EVALUATION

Evaluation of this part of the unit will be completed using the following assessment tools:

- Learning Logs – Reflective journals and dialogue journals
- Observations – Anecdotal records
- Performance Tasks – Role play
- Projects – Work samples
- Written Communication – Stories
- Visual Communications – Illustrations

— **Angela Antosh**

Part Two – Writer’s Workshop

WRITER’S WORKSHOP

Homework
Headings, Organized, Neat
RCRC Strategy – Read, Cover, Recite, Check Questions
Proofreading
Test-Taking Skills – True or False, Multiple Choice

RESOURCES

Archer, Anita and Mary Gleason, assisted by Linda Lungren. (1989). *Skills For School Success*. Curriculum Associates: North Billenica, Mass.

Romain, Trevor. (1997). *Bullies Are a Pain in the Brain*. Free Spirit: Minneapolis.

Saskatchewan Education. (June, 1992). *English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level*.

SKILLS FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

Skills for School Success is a program that has proven to be very helpful in teaching in a multi-age classroom. The program comes with a Teacher’s Guide and a student workbook. Therefore, it can be taught using the books. The concepts are taught every year with additions as the grade levels progress. The program is available for Grades 3, 4, and 5. I have used the books as a guide and have fit the concepts to our thematic units. The skills are incorporated into our unit on “Friendship”, which covers many aspects of being a friend to ourselves and others. As well, I have used information on bullying so that students can identify bullying behavior and how bullying relates to friendship to oneself and others.

Skills for School Success strategies would fall under a variety of Foundational Objectives as outlined in Saskatchewan Curriculum Guides. The lessons presented were taught during Writer’s Workshop for the first five weeks of school. The Foundational Objectives chosen for this unit from the 1992 Saskatchewan English Language Arts Curriculum are listed below according to grade level. However, the objectives are similar with additions as students progress. There are many students in a multi-age classroom who could meet the grade 5 objectives but are in lower grades. Therefore, the objectives are meant to be a guide.

FOUNDATIONAL OBJECTIVES

GRADE 3

- Use of proofreading, editing, and revising procedures to clarify written communication
- Interest and ability to read orally and silently for enjoyment and information
- Ability to monitor for meaning during oral and silent reading

GRADE 4

- Ability to proofread, edit and revise written communication to ensure clarity
- Ability to adjust oral and silent reading rates to the complexity of the material and the purpose for reading
- Ability to integrate the cueing systems and monitor for meaning during oral and silent reading

GRADE 5

- Ability to proofread, edit and revise written communication to ensure clarity and precision
- Ability to adjust oral and silent reading rates to the complexity of the material and the purpose for reading
- Ability to use the cueing systems and monitor for meaning during reading

Other objectives of the unit are to help students to become organized in the classroom. I have included strategies for reading and test-taking practice. Skills for School Success is an excellent program for teaching process oriented techniques, organization and some memory techniques. While much of this appears to be common sense teaching, many students have not been exposed to the concepts presented.

COMMON ESSENTIAL LEARNINGS (CELS)

- Communication
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Values and Skills
- Numeracy
- Independent Learning

EVALUATION

Evaluation of the unit will be completed using a variety of assessment tools, including:

- Tests – Multiple Choice and True/False
- Learning Logs – Dialogue journals
- Observations – Anecdotal records
- Performance Tasks – Role play
- Projects – Work samples
- Rubrics
- Self-Assessment

— Angela Antosh

Part Three – Friendship: Self and Others

PART I – ALL ABOUT ME

Who Am I?
Valuing a Name
Important Me
Appreciating Uniqueness
Family
Me Map
How Others See Me

PART II – FRIENDSHIP

Appreciating Others' Uniqueness
Application for Friendship
George and Martha
How to Win Friends
Friends and Helpers
Are You a Good Friend?
Friendship Pie
Friendship Bingo

RESOURCES

DuVall, Rick. (1997). *Building Character and Community in the Classroom*. Creative Teaching Press: Cypress, CA

Saskatchewan Education. (1995). *Curriculum Guide for Elementary Science*.

Saskatchewan Education. (1992). *English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide for Elementary Level*.

FICTION

Arthur's Nose, March Brown

Be Good to Eddie Lee, Virginia Fleming

Charlotte's Web, E. B. White

George and Martha, James Marshall

How to Lose All Your Friends, Nancy Carlson

My Name is Maria Isabel, Alma Flor Alda

The Important Book, Margaret Wise Brown

FOUNDATIONAL OBJECTIVES

This unit will explore the concept of friendship. Students will explore their thoughts and feelings about being a friend to themselves, as well as having friends and being a friend to others. The focus on friendships provides a context in which students can learn about themselves and others – their appearances, talents, activities and behaviours, including their strengths and weaknesses. The overall goals are to enable students to increase their self-awareness and self-confidence and develop their sense of personal responsibility and acceptance of themselves and others as unique and valued individuals. A variety of literature selections have been chosen to assist in the students' understanding of friendship.

Students will demonstrate the following knowledge, abilities, and attitudes from Saskatchewan's 1992 English Language Arts Curriculum and 1995 Elementary Science Curriculum:

LANGUAGE ARTS		
Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to use oral language to clarify and extend their personal understandings of what they observe, feel, hear and read through interaction with others• interest and ability to adapt oral and written language to various settings, purposes and the needs of their audiences• respect for the ideas, language and communication styles of others and awareness of the need for sensitive and thoughtful response• interest and ability to read and respond to what others have written, and to collaborate with them in the stages of the writing process• interest and ability to read orally and silently for enjoyment and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to use oral language to generate, clarify and extend their personal understandings of what they observe, feel, hear and read through personal reflection and interaction with others• ability to communicate ideas, orally and in writing to a variety of peer, adult and group audiences with growing confidence, sensitivity, fluency and clarity• ability and confidence to adapt oral and written language to various settings, purposes and the needs of their audiences• respect for the ideas, language and communication styles of others and ability to respond sensitively and thoughtfully	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confidence and competence in using oral language to clarify and extend their personal understandings of what they observe, feel, hear and read through personal reflection and interaction with others• ability to communicate ideas, orally and in writing, to a variety of peer, adult and group audiences with growing confidence, sensitivity, fluency and clarity• ability and confidence to adapt oral and written language to various settings, purposes and the needs of their audiences• respect for the ideas, language and communication styles of others and ability to respond sensitively and thoughtfully

LANGUAGE ARTS (continued)

Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to read orally and silently by integrating all cueing systems • ability to monitor for meaning during oral and silent reading • maturity of thought in interpreting and responding to various types of literature • awareness of, and respect for, the range of cultures and behaviours, experiences, emotions and ideas conveyed in literature • ability to interpret and respond to ideas conveyed through various media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to proofread, edit and revise written communication to ensure clarity • interest in reading as a means of understanding themselves and their world • ability to adjust oral and silent reading rates to the complexity of the material and the purpose for reading • ability to integrate the cueing systems and monitor for meaning during oral and silent reading. • awareness of, and respect for, the similarities and differences found among cultures, human, behaviours, experiences, emotions and ideas conveyed through literature. • maturity of thought in interpreting and responding to various media and print materials • ability to convey ideas using various media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to proofread, edit and revise written communication to ensure clarity and precision • interest in reading as a means of understanding themselves and their world • ability to adjust oral and silent reading rates to the complexity of the material and the purpose for reading • ability to use the cueing systems and monitor for meaning during reading • awareness of, and respect for, the similarities and differences found among cultures, human behaviours, experiences, emotions and ideas conveyed through literature and various media • maturity of thought in interpreting and responding to various media and print materials • ability to convey ideas using various media

Students will also demonstrate knowledge of the following key concepts from the Saskatchewan Curriculum Guide for Elementary Science (www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/elemsci/scilesca.html):

SCIENCE		
Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
A1 Private/Public B2 Interaction B3 Orderliness B4 Organisms B6 Symmetry B10 Cause-Effect B13 Conservation B16 System B18 Population B26 Evolution C1 Classify C2 Communicating C3 Observing and Describing C4 Working Cooperatively C14 Problem Solving C19 Consensus Making E5 Computer Interaction F4 Valuing Natural Environment G2 Confidence	A1 Private/Public B2 Interaction B3 Orderliness B4 Organisms B6 Symmetry B10 Cause-Effect B13 Conservation B16 System B18 Population B26 Evolution C1 Classify C2 Communicating C3 Observing and Describing C4 Working Cooperatively C14 Problem Solving C19 Consensus Making E5 Computer Interaction F4 Valuing Natural Environment G2 Confidence	A1 Private/Public B2 Interaction B3 Orderliness B4 Organisms B6 Symmetry B10 Cause-Effect B13 Conservation B16 System B18 Population B26 Evolution C1 Classify C2 Communicating C3 Observing and Describing C4 Working Cooperatively C14 Problem Solving C19 Consensus Making E5 Computer Interaction F4 Valuing Natural Environment G2 Confidence

— Val Tataryn

Part Four – Friendship Fractions

FRIENDSHIP FRACTIONS

Friendship Fractions
Fractions and Geoboards
Comparing Fractions
Comparing Fractions with Different Denominators
Fractions of a Set
Equivalent Fractions
Ones, Tenths, Hundredths
Addition/Subtraction of Fractions
Dollars and Cents

RESOURCES

Currah, Joanne, Jane Felling, and Cheryl McDonald. (1997). *All Hands on Deck: Box Cars and One-Eyed Jacks*.

Currah, Joanne, Jane Felling and Cheryl McDonald. (1997). *Shuffling Into Math Games for K-3: Box Cars and One-Eyed Jacks*.

Hugel, Bob. (1998). *Secret Code Math*. Scholastic: New York, Toronto, London, Auckland, Sydney, Mexico City, New Delhi, Hong Kong.

Rucker, Walter and Clyde A. Dilley. (1993). *Math Card Games*. Ideal School Supply Company: Alsip, IL.

1987. *MathQuest*. Addison-Wesley Publishers Limited: Don Mills, Ontario, Reading Massachusetts, Menlo Park, California, Wokingham, Berkshire, Amsterdam, Sydney, Singapore, Tokyo, Madrid, Bogota, Santiago, San Juan.

Quest 2000, *Exploring Mathematics*. Addison-Wesley Publishers, Limited: Don Mills, Ontario, Menlo Park California, Wokingham, Amsterdam, Bonn, Sydney, Singapore, Tokyo, Madrid, San Juan, Paris, Seoul, Milan, Menlo Park, California, Taipei.

Saskatchewan Education. (September, 1992). *A Curriculum Guide: Elementary Mathematics*.

FOUNDATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Students will be meet the following learning objectives in the 1992 Saskatchewan Elementary Mathematics Curriculum with respect to Numbers and Operations (N) and Measurement (M) (www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/elemath/uss.html):

MATHEMATICS		
Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> estimate an amount by (c) partitioning into equal parts (N-26) compare the size of fractions by using a variety of manipulatives and materials (N-87) use manipulatives, when sharing, to develop the concept of fraction (N-88) demonstrate by using manipulatives and pictures, the concept of fraction as (a) part of a shape or solid – $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$; $1/10$; n/d, $n < 10$, $d < 10$; (b) part of a group of objects – $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$; $1/10$; n/d, $n < 10$, $d < 10$; (c) a point on a number line (N-89) demonstrate by using correct symbols, the concept of fractions for (a) $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$ (N-90) understand that fractions represent partitioning into equal-sized parts of the whole (N-91) demonstrate equivalent fractions by (a) using manipulatives and pictures (N-92) understand the relationship between the concrete, pictorial, verbal, and symbolic representations of (a) fraction (N-93) use manipulatives, pictures and symbols to order fractions (a) having like denominators (N-94) understand the relationship between (a) pennies, nickels, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> estimate an amount by (c) partitioning into equal parts (N-26) compare the size of fractions by using a variety of manipulatives and materials (N-87) use manipulatives, when sharing, to develop the concept of fraction (N-88) demonstrate by using manipulatives and pictures, the concept of fraction as (a) part of a shape or solid – $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$; $1/10$; n/d, $n < 10$, $d < 10$; (b) part of a group of objects – $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$; $1/10$; n/d, $n < 10$, $d < 10$; (c) a point on a number line (N-89) demonstrate by using correct symbols, the concept of fractions for (a) $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$; $n < 10$, $d < 10$ (N-90) understand that fractions represent partitioning into equal-sized parts of the whole (N-91) demonstrate equivalent fractions by (a) using manipulatives and pictures (N-92) understand the relationship between the concrete, pictorial, verbal, and symbolic representations of (a) fraction (b) mixed numbers (N-93) use manipulatives, pictures and symbols to order fractions (a) having like denominators (b) having like numerators (N-94) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> estimate an amount by (c) partitioning into equal parts (N-26) compare the size of fractions by using a variety of manipulatives and materials (N-87) use manipulatives, when sharing, to develop the concept of fraction (N-88) demonstrate by using manipulatives and pictures, the concept of fraction as (a) part of a shape or solid – $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$; $1/10$; n/d, $n < 10$, $d < 10$; (b) part of a group of objects – $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$; $1/10$; n/d, $n < 10$, $d < 10$; (c) a point on a number line (N-89) demonstrate by using correct symbols, the concept of fractions for (a) $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$; (b) n/d, $n < 10$, $d < 10$ (N-90) understand that fractions represent partitioning into equal-sized parts of the whole (N-91) demonstrate equivalent fractions by (a) using manipulatives and pictures; (b) multiplying/ dividing' (c) expressing a fraction in simplest terms (N-92) understand the relationship between the concrete, pictorial, verbal, and symbolic representations of (a) fraction (b) mixed numbers (N-93) use manipulatives, pictures and symbols to order

MATHEMATICS (continued)		
Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<p>dimes; (b) quarters, dollars (M-61)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • add and subtract amounts of money using correct symbols (a) cents or dollars (b) dollars and cents (M-64) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand and use the terms (a) numerator, denominator, equivalent fraction (N-95) • convert to a decimal fraction (vice versa) a common fraction with a denominator of (a) 2, 10 (N-96) • use manipulatives and pictures to solve problems involving addition and subtraction of fractions with (a) like denominators (N-97) • understand the relationship of common fractions to decimal fractions for (a) 10ths (N-100) • use manipulatives and pictures to illustrate addition and subtraction of decimal fractions (a) 10ths (N-106) • add and subtract decimal fraction by aligning similar place value columns (a) 10ths (N-108) • understand the relationship between (a) pennies, nickels, dimes; (b) quarters, dollars (M-61) • add and subtract amounts of money using correct symbols (a) cents or dollars (b) dollars and cents (M-64) 	<p>fractions (a) having like denominators (b) having like numerators (c) by comparing to one-half or a unit (N-94)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand and use the terms (a) numerator, denominator, equivalent fraction (b) simplified fractions (N-95) • convert to a decimal fraction (vice versa) a common fraction with a denominator of (a) 2, 10 (b) factors of 100 (c) non-factors of 100 (approximately) (N-96) • use manipulatives and pictures to solve problems involving addition and subtraction of fractions with (a) like denominators (b) compatible unlike denominators (N-97) • understand the relationship of common fractions to decimal fractions for (a) 10ths (N-100) • use manipulatives and pictures to illustrate addition and subtraction of decimal fractions (a) 10ths (N-106) • add and subtract decimal fraction by aligning similar place value columns (a) 10ths (N-108) • understand the relationship between (a) pennies, nickles, dimes; (b) quarters, dollars (M-61) • add and subtract amounts of money using correct symbols (a) cents or dollars (b) dollars and cents (M-64)

— Val Tataryn

Part Five – Physical Education: Cooperative Games

PHYSICAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE GAMES

Pairs
Triads
Small Group
Large Group
Whole Group

RESOURCES

Saskatchewan Education. (August, 1999). *Physical Education 1-5: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level*.

FOUNDATIONAL OBJECTIVES

The activities presented in this unit draw in particular from the Personal-Social-Cultural perspective of the Elementary Physical Education Curriculum. The concepts of participation, effort, self-direction, respect for the rights and feelings of others, caring for and helping others and using these values outside of the physical education classes and at work and leisure provide the guidelines for allowing students to become more responsible.

As outlined in the curriculum, "effort" and "self-direction" address the students' responsibility for personal development. The concepts of "respect" and "caring" address the students' social and moral responsibility for their relationships with others and members of groups. Focus is on the transfer of responsibility from the physical education setting to the students' lives at home, on the playground, in the school, and in the community and its application to the real working world and community.

Through participation in physical education, students will develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become physically educated persons. They will learn:

1. To exhibit progress towards achievement of a physically active lifestyle.
2. To exhibit progress towards achievement and maintenance of a health enhancing level of physical fitness.
3. To demonstrate increasing competency in many physical activities and to become increasingly proficient in a few physical activities.

4. To become more able to apply movement concepts and principles to understand and develop movement patterns and skills.
5. To demonstrate increasingly responsible personal and social behavior in physical activity settings.
6. To demonstrate a deepening understanding and respect for differences among people in a physical activity setting.
7. To gain a better understanding of the role of physical activity in providing opportunities for enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, social interaction, work and leisure.

KEYS TO COOPERATIVE GAMES

- Heterogenous groupings, students with varying abilities and cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
- Balance between pair activities and larger group activities with up to five members;
- Structured tasks that involve the necessary participation of each group member to complete;
- Awareness of each individual that he/she has a role in the task and is accountable to the group and for his/her own learning;
- Need for the instructor to discuss and model desired collaborative skills;
- Need for the instructors to observe the demonstration of the skills as the students participate in the cooperative learning activities;
- Opportunity for students to reflect individually and as a group on what has been accomplished; and
- Evaluation by students of the process and reflection on the cooperative skills using a variety of self-assessment tools.

EVALUATION

There are a variety of ways of assessing student learning. Some suggestions are given below:

- Conferences and interviews with individuals and groups, recording responses on anecdotal observation grids;
- Peer and group assessment using a list of descriptors or a rating scale;
- Happy face self-assessment to rate their own performance on the task or activity; and
- Thumbs up, sideways or down is a quick and easy self-assessment method for elementary students.

— **George Rozdilsky**

Part Six – The Rubric: An Effective Assessment Tool for a Multi-Age Classroom

THE RUBRIC

The rubric is an excellent tool for which students can evaluate themselves at their own ability levels. A rubric can be created for drawing activities, writing activities or any activity on which the class is working. Rubrics can be teacher created or student/teacher created. Students work on the same assignments, however expectations are different for differing levels of ability. Thus, with the rubric in place, expectations are clearly defined for students. Examples of a teacher created and a student/teacher created rubric are provided below:

SAMPLE WRITING EXPECTATIONS

CRITERIA	1	2	3
Content (5Ws)Who, What, When, Where, Why	1 or 2 of the questions answered	More than 2 but not all of the questions answered	All questions answered
Ideas and Detail	One idea, little detail	More than 1 idea, some detail	Uses describing words to make the story more exciting and to add detail to the story
Sentence Structure, spelling, punctuation, dialogue	Short sentences, lots of spelling errors, periods only, no dialogue	Some longer sentences, few spelling errors, some different punctuation	Sentences make sense, some paragraphs, almost no spelling errors, correct punctuation
Organization	No story	Beginning to make sense	Story makes sense
Time, neatness	5 minutes, messy	12 minutes, neat	20 minutes, neat

This rubric was created based on the language and knowledge of students in the classroom.

SAMPLE “BEST JOB” DRAWING EXPECTATIONS

CRITERIA	1	2	3
Time	Under 15 minutes	15 minutes	30 minutes
Color	Not colored	Some color	All colored
Creative	No detail	Some detail	Lots of detail
Neat	Scribble, messy	Sort of neat	Very neat

— **Angela Antosh**

APPENDIX 5

Teacher Survey

1. Do you multi-age in your classroom? Why or why not?

Yes

No

4

4

Yes - Reasons include the philosophy, the grant, numbers of students and best practice academically

No - K philosophy would not meet the needs of students

Primary – the decision was made last year to have straight grades

Non-understanding of philosophy

2. What is your definition of multi-aging?

Age-level/grade level combinations

Components: Collaboration – teacher

Cooperative learning

Peer-tutoring

Role-modeling

Skill focus – academically rather than grade/age

Students responsible for own learning (constructivist teaching and learning)

Relationship building

Process learning

Evaluation and assessment can give a better picture of student achievement and needs because of relationship with the teacher

Student/teacher relationship as they work together for two or more years

One survey respondent could not define multi-aging.

3. What is the purpose of multi-aging?

Student/teacher/family relationship

Social development/life skills

Cooperative/collaborative setting

No labeling i.e., grade level abilities and age appropriateness

Three survey answers were not sure why this would be done.

4. How important is having a common approach and understanding of multi-aging among all staff in order for it to happen?

Very important

Necessary for it to work

Whole staff commitment

Commitment is important even when staff do not agree on philosophy

Support needs to be in place

Reasons – provides children with a stable environment where there is a focus on goals and understandings.

Communication – collaboration, teacher reflection, discussion, evaluation, planning

5. Do you think multi-aging is applicable to this school? Why or why not?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Maybe</u>
4	1	3

Yes - Relationships

Research on youth-at-risk
Reflects the Aboriginal World-view of the extended family into the classroom
Communities of Hope Document
Provides stability for students who may come from a transient life-style
Holistic approach to teaching and learning works with youth-at-risk

No - Students need structure, routine, and guidance
Maturity level, factors outside of school, skills and independent work habits of some students make it difficult for them to work with other teachers

Maybe/Don't Know- Depends on teacher, teacher-style, and belief
Transition to other classrooms gives students opportunities to misbehave

6. Do you feel multi-aging meets the academic needs of students?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Maybe</u>
4	2	2

Yes - Curriculum: adaptive, modified, skill
Progress at own rate
Cooperative learning
Role-modeling
Peer-tutoring occurs almost naturally
Strengths are reciprocal, help each other in areas of expertise
Builds on prior knowledge through thematic teaching

No - Many non-readers that have problems with literacy and numeracy, therefore, need a more structured program than multi-age classroom can provide
The perception of peer-tutoring is that students just copy
Literacy/numeracy needs requires the guidance of a teacher

7. Do you feel multi-aging meets the social needs of students?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Maybe</u>
5	1	2

Yes - Experience working with different age groups
Develop empathy for others
Learn skills to function in a diverse community
Reflects real-life
Role-modeling

No - Older kids set negative example for younger ones
At primary level need stability and need to form relationships with kids their own age

Maybe - Maturity level of students is a main concern

8. Describe how your family grouping is using the Stirling McDowell research grant?

Primary - Collaborative planning on common themes
Group students for Art smart
Sharing resources
Discussion around multi-aging issues and concerns

Intermediate - Collaborative planning
Buy materials for school
Difficult to plan during school time without support for planning days

Senior - Planning days usually spent planning upcoming units and researching materials
Writing for project
Very little of the time is spent together

9. Describe the approach of your family grouping (i.e., theming, collaborative planning) toward multi-aging.

Senior - Began with common themes and units but has not been followed by both classrooms (do own thing)
Classrooms not getting together, other than for guitar

Intermediate - Revolving curriculum
Common timetable
Thematic units developed using cross-curriculum and cross-grade objectives
Skill group for literacy/numeracy
Weekly family meetings (teacher, teacher librarian and teacher associates)
Variety of instructional approaches

Primary- Skill groups literacy/numeracy
Common themes
Collaborative planning

10. What are some considerations or planning that need to be in place before a school initiates a multi-aging approach?

All staff have to have a common picture which answers: What is it? Why are we doing it?
Parental support and understanding
Inservices/PD
Communication with staff and parents

APPENDIX 6

Teacher Associate Survey

The Teacher Associates were given the same survey as teachers and only questions applicable to them were answered.

1. N/A

2. What is your definition of multi-aging?

Family groupings
Children of different age groups working together
Family members grouped together
Skill groups
Theming
Not grade specific
Collaborative teaching and learning

3. What is the purpose of multi-aging?

Keep families together
Help children not feel stigma of failing
Same teacher for two to three years
Older students help younger students
Teachers plan together

4. How important is having a common approach and understanding of multi-aging among all staff in order for it to happen?

Very important
More communication between family groupings
Consistency
Communication with students, staff, and classrooms

5. Do you think multi-aging is applicable to this school? Why or why not?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
1	2

Yes - Many students at different stages of learning

No - There are social consequences on younger students to grow up too soon
Group transition does not work and teaching time is lost because of it
Not enough structure
Not enough positive role-modeling

6. Do you feel multi-aging meets the academic needs of students?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Maybe</u>
1	1	1

Yes - Able to work at own levels

No - Some students missed specific skills and there was an expectation on students to know material never covered, i.e. sentence structure, paragraphing, parts of speech, writing skills

Maybe - Skill grouping is great, however, at times behavior problems occur in skill groups as well

7. Do you feel multi-aging meets the social needs of students?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
1	2

Yes - Interacting with others enhances self-esteem

No - Some younger students take on attitudes of older students
Great differences in size especially for Phys. Ed.
Some younger students have taken backward steps and have been lost academically and socially

8. N/A

9. N/A

10. What are some considerations on planning that need to be in place before a school initiates a multi-aging approach?

- Needs of students
- Behavior needs
- Consistency and structure than multi-aging does not provide

APPENDIX 7

Student Survey

1. How do you feel/what do you think about working at tables?

Like	Don't Know	Don't Like
22	9	18

2. How do you feel/what do you think about different age groups working together?

Like	Don't Know	Don't Like
24	9	17

3. How do you feel/what do you think about learning with the other Intermediate Family classes?

Like	Don't Know	Don't Like
18	13	17

4. How do you feel/what do you think about having the same classroom teacher for two or more years?

Like	Don't Know	Don't Like
29	12	6

5. How do you feel/what do you think about learning within themes?

Like	Don't Know	Don't Like
25	13	10

6. How do you feel/what do you think about working in skill groups?

Like	Don't Know	Don't Like
23	17	8

7. How do you feel/what do you think about learning in cooperative groups?

Like	Don't Know	Don't Like
19	20	10

8. How do you feel/what do you think about learning through role play, simulations and games?

Like	Don't Know	Don't Like
27	13	7

9. How do you feel/what do you think about learning through experiments?

Like	Don't Know	Don't Like
36	4	5

10. What ways do you think you learn best at school? List those you have found helpful in past years and in the current year.

Reading	10	Writing	1
Listening	7	Math	1
Experiments	13	Don't Know	5
Games	12		

APPENDIX 8

Parent Survey – Intermediate Family

This survey of parents and guardians was sent out during the week of April 12 prior to the survey from the collaborative group that was sent out during the week of May 8. The response from the latter survey was 5 out of 43 (11%) as opposed to the former survey's response of 24 out of 68 (34%). The group decided to use the results from the first survey sent out by the Intermediate Family because of the higher percentage of responses. The survey is somewhat different than that of the collaborative group's survey.

1. How do you feel/what do you think about different age groups working together?

Like It	Don't Know	Don't Like It
15	4	5

2. How do you feel/what do you think about having the same classroom teacher for two or more years?

Like It	Don't Know	Don't Like It
24	1	0

3. How do you feel/what do you think about learning within themes?

Like It	Don't Know	Don't Like It
14	5	5

4. How do you feel/what do you think about working in skill groups, e.g., Reading Groups and Math Groups?

Like It	Don't Know	Don't Like It
20	1	3

5. How do you feel/what do you think about learning in cooperative groups?

Like It	Don't Know	Don't Like It
15	5	4

6. How do you think your child learns best?

- When he is comfortable with teacher/students/surroundings
- When someone takes the time to listen and to go the extra little mile with him with encouragement and praise
- Skill groups
- From other kids that are a peer to him and a lot of one on one
- Works well independently
- When she is doing a subject she likes to do
- My child is not comfortable changing classrooms or classmates; she learns best in her own classroom with her own classmates
- By herself
- Good communication with teacher and parent

- By showing her what she is to learn, let her do it on her own and let her ask questions when she is unsure of her assignment
- With her friends (working with her peers)
- Likes to be by himself, because when he is with his friends, he tends to not pay attention
- In small groups or groups where they are allowed to help each other; show her how to do something, then let her try it on her own; if something is not quite right, explain what it is
- Communication skills with parent and teacher
- By working in groups
- When she has beneficial assistance
- Learns best if he has a better communication with teacher if he has more confidence in his ability to learn and understand from others and to have more patience.
- When she is doing things that are fun they learn a lot better
- Through stories and group talks (small)
- One on one student teacher
- Visually; hands on (practical); making it interesting (regardless of subject); repetition; consistency
- One on one; less stress; at his own desk

7. How do you think teachers at Westmount could best prepare your child to move up to Senior Family (Grades 6, 7, 8)?

- By teaching good life skills
- Maybe telling the next teachers the strengths and weaknesses of the child so they know how to deal with issues that may arise
- More work on subjects like math, history, etc.
- Give them more responsibility like homework and doing things for others; make them keep the classroom neat and pick up after themselves; and to learn how to cooperate with others even if they are having a hard time
- Encourage and challenge—if done the schoolwork would be able to work at the next level without holding the child back
- Send more homework home so they can get used to doing more homework in higher grades
- She needs to be more at a Grade 4 level because that is the grade she is suppose to be in
- Let the child know where they stand and the kind of help they need
- Let them have their own desks. I think they would learn responsibility, respect and I don't like the fact that the children share tables to do their work. I think it more distracting for the children who want to learn and send homework home with the children
- I don't know
- Remind the kids to talk out problems, not hit or be mean by saying things about others; get them to do projects working with different groups; get them to take stuff home to do so they get prepared for more homework
- Slowly make sure their skills are standard not for them to fall behind
- By better watching the Grades 6s. Make them more comfortable with the older kids
- With cooperation at different levels with supervision on both children and teacher
- I have heard from other parents whose children have attended Westmount School and they were not prepared academically, e.g. in Math, English and Social Studies
- Send more homework home so they can get used to doing more work in the higher grades
- Start talking about it more and make it positive and fun things
- Tell them more of what to expect in those grades
- I believe that if a child is progressing at a level that is expected or even excelling, he/she should be challenged more. This not only prepares him/her for Senior Family, but if followed throughout elementary school will only strengthen his/her skills and abilities into high school
- No idea!

8. If you were to move your child to another school, how could he/she be best prepared for that change?

- Try to introduce some children to your child from that new school
- Meet the teacher(s) before they start the new school
- Show them around the new school before the previous school year ends
- Do not know
- I think by telling them that not all schools teach the same way, even if it is the same topics, but I think to that it should be a parent responsibility to make them understand it better
- Getting them ready for new environment and different work
- She could be best prepared by having the capabilities that a Grade 4 student should know and learn
- Don't know; each child is different
- Get rid of the multi-age planning. I would love to see and hear my children doing Social Studies and Science projects in school. I don't see my children learning the things they should be academically, in some of their subjects. I remember the things I was taught in these grades and I don't see my children learning these things. I want my children to bring homework home after school and on weekends. I like to know what they are learning and their having trouble with, so I can help at home also, but that doesn't happen. I would also like to see the children learn about different cultures, not just native (Cree) cultures. I don't like the fact that a child in Grade 5 is learning the same things as a child in Grade 3. I've sat in a few classes and this is what I've seen. I understand if the child is having trouble with a subject and needs the help; other than that I don't think it is a good thing.
- By having her get involved with things she did at her previous school
- I had a son that changed from our school to another and he did great. So, whatever you did was good. The teacher talked to him about the change
- Don't know
- I'm not too sure. Maybe by telling them to stay with someone they know until they know the school and get to know other people
- By understanding with the family support and the support of friends and the teacher in both new and old school
- I would want to know if they are at the same grade level as they were at Westmount
- Get them used to a new school and learning to deal with new work and meeting friends and teacher
- I'm not sure, this isn't something I'm considering
- Talk to the child and explain that they will be leaving the school
- The best way I can see is that when they make the transition that the proper resources and clear communication is in place, so that their needs are being addressed and there is no gap in terms of areas needing work. I understand this is not always possible, but this is one of the ways the child and family can be prepared. A child moving to a new school can be a significant transition. However, having the bridge between the two schools can only help the child, especially where learning or behavioural problems are concerned. Note: The questions I answered "don't know" are because other than report cards these areas have never been discussed with me. Things were mentioned in Parent/Teacher interviews, but more information would be of benefit
- I want to move [my son] to Caswell. It has better academic standards; and hopefully less bullying. [He] can also get to the Learning Disability Centre on his own from there. Do you know some schools pay for taxis to get kids to the ABC Program?

Comments from second parent/guardian survey:

3. Do you have an understanding of why multi-aging approach is used at Westmount Community School?
 - Not enough space or teachers
5. Do you prefer to have your child in a multi-aged classroom (e.g., more than one grade) instead of a single-graded classroom?
 - Keep ages together

6. Has your child been successful in a multi-age classroom setting?
 - Yes, her learning is working good, but older kids seem to be a distraction
7. Do you think it helps your child(ren) to have the same classroom teacher for two or more years?
 - Yes, because these teachers get to know the students
8. Do you think multi-aging works at Westmount Community School?
 - Yes, but it seems the older age groups bother the learning of the younger groups. Older kids cannot resist the temptation to bully or overinfluence the younger kids.
 - I don't think that multi-aged settings are the best learning environments for all students

APPENDIX 9

Parent Survey – Primary and Senior Families

1. Do you have a good understanding of the Multi-Age approach at Westmount Community School?

Primary

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1	2	6		5

- It was not properly discussed with community, leaving it open to unawareness.

Senior

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
	7	1	3	

- I don't know what the program is about.

2. Has communication between Westmount Community School and parents been satisfactory regarding Multi-Aging?

Primary

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
2	4	1	1	6

- I wouldn't know because my daughter is not there yet.
- Didn't know anything about it until my kids started attending the school.

Senior

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1	1	6	1	2

- According to Jeffrey it is a lot of youth of different ages into one class.

3. Do you have an understanding of why Multi-Aging approach is used at Westmount Community School?

Primary

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1	6			7

- I really don't know why it's in the school.

Senior

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
	2	8	1	

- Sounds good but I would need more info on Multi-Aging.

4. Do you have a child in a Multi-Aged classroom at Westmount Community School?

Primary

Yes	No	Don't Know
1	13	1

Senior

Yes	No	Don't Know
9	2	

- What is a Multi-Age group?

5. Do you prefer to have your child in a Multi-Aged classroom (e.g., more than one grade) instead of a single-graded classroom?

Primary

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
4	4	1	1	

- As a parent and community member I do not agree with Multi-Aging because of the enrolment.
- I think it makes the child want to grow up too fast and they will not act their age.
- Because they get bored and I think they look forward to going to a new classroom every year.
- Disagree to a point but if my child has the ability to move forward more quickly it may be alright.
- I really don't like the classes being split the way they are. If there are enough students for each grade then that's the way it should be done.
- Because of the bigger/older children may influence and discourage the younger children from learning or just to enjoy being at school.

Senior

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1	1	5	3	1

- In the younger ones maybe.
- For Cree class yes but for other subjects no.

6. Has your child been successful in a Multi-Age classroom setting?

Primary

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1	1	7		

- He's never been in one.
- Have no idea.

Senior

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1		6	2	2

- It has taught child to be more disruptive.
- No he is not improving.

7. Do you think it helps your child to have the same classroom teacher for two or more years?

Primary

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	1

- Yes, I went to a private school as a child and my teacher moved with me all the way to Grade 8. It was very beneficial.
- Other teachers have skills and knowledge that may benefit child development.
- As long as the teacher is setting a good example.
- All depends, sometimes it would be good because the teacher would already know the students work. But in other cases it might not be so good to have the same teacher more than once.

Senior

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1		3	2	5

- If the teacher can handle the class, great!

8. Do you think Multi-Aging works at Westmount Community School?

Primary

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1	1	2		9

- I really don't know if it is working at the school. All I know is that I don't really care for it myself. The same age group should stick together (not have 7 year old with 10 year old).
- I know of 10 families that left because of multi-aging.

Senior

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1		3	2	5

- To some extent in the younger ones but not 7 and 8.
- It works in some areas but not others.

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