

What else should I know ?

- Children are grouped heterogeneously in classrooms. There is a range of ability, interest and needs within the different age groupings.
- Given the opportunity children select friends, playmates and group mates from a wide age range and interact more successfully than they do with peers in same-age groups.
- Children mature and reach stages of readiness at different rates, and this needs to be acknowledged when planning for their learning.
- Students stay with teacher(s) for more than one year. Teachers get to know students well and provide for continuity in their learning, and children avoid the adjustment to new teachers annually.
- There is an increase in opportunity for parent involvement as parents are considered part of the multiage family. Teachers get to know parents better because they have their children for longer, and in some cases teach more than one child from the same family.
- Multilevel/multiage programs like other classrooms recognize that each student is at a different stage of learning and focuses on the developmental stage of the learner. Multilevel/multiage programs address curriculum concepts, skills and understandings over a two to three year period.

- Families have the opportunity to develop a relationship with school staff over a longer period.
- Multilevel/multiage classrooms can reflect natural family groupings, siblings can be placed in the same classroom. This simplifies demands on families for attending class events, volunteering and communicating with the school.
- Families may experience less stress related to beginning a new school year and adapting to the expectations and routines of a new classroom.

Ecole Constable Edward Finney School

MULTIAGE/MULTILEVEL CLASSROOMS

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Information for Families

“The child who creeps at an early age is not superior to the child who takes his own sweet time. Children are born when they are ready. They creep when they are ready. They walk when they are ready. They teethe when they are ready. But they go to school . . . ready or not, when they are five” (Grant, 1986).



WHAT IS A MULTIAGE CLASSROOM?

A multiage classroom is an environment where children of more than one grade level are grouped together for instruction. In this environment the teacher provides a developmentally appropriate curriculum based on each child's individual needs and interests. The term “developmentally appropriate” means that each child's own progress and growth are used to determine what he or she is ready to accomplish. This philosophy recognizes that students learn and develop at different rates, just as they learn to crawl, talk, and ride a bike at different rates. Children spend two or more years with the same teacher and the same core group of classmates, with older students exiting at year's end and new students joining each fall term.



WHY MULTIAGE?

“ In multilevel classrooms in Manitoba, students across two or more grade levels are with the same teacher for two or more years. These classrooms become stable learning communities over several years, engaging students, parents, and educators in quality learning.” (Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community. BLM12)

1. Teachers get to know children in depth, planning for their individual strengths needs and interests. Time becomes a positive variable.
2. Problems associated with the yearly transition from one grade to another can be overcome. The teacher has a core group of students who remain with her/him from the previous year and are able to welcome and aid in the transition of the incoming students each Fall.
3. Students have an increased sense of stability due to consistency of routines, expectations and traditions that carry over from one year to the next.
4. Children have a broader social experience with increased opportunities to lead and to follow, to collaborate and to make stable peer relationships.

More information can be found at

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth
Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community.

Available online
www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/multilevel/

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON BENEFITS OF MULTIAGE CLASSROOMS

Professor Barbara Pavan reviewed 64 research studies on non-graded (multiage) schools. Pavan found that 58% of those students in multiage classes performed better than their peers on measures of academic achievement. 33% performed as well as their peers, and only 9% did worse than their peers.

Pavan also found that students in multiage settings were more likely than their peers to have positive self-concepts, high self-esteem, and good attitudes toward school. Her review of the research also indicates that benefits to students increase the longer they are in a non-graded setting, and that "underachieving" students also benefit from being in multiage classrooms. (This research summary can be found in the October 1992 issue of Educational Leadership, pp. 22-24.)

Parents are often concerned that older children in a multiage setting will not benefit as much as younger children. Research shows, however, that when older students teach information and skills to their younger classmates, their academic performances, and even IQ scores, dramatically improve.

Educational research indicates that students benefit both academically and emotionally from being placed in multiage classrooms.

FREQUENTLY ASKED PARENT QUESTIONS

How long will my son be in the multilevel classroom?

In many communities in Manitoba multilevel classrooms are common, and span from two to nine grades in the same classroom. Some multilevel classes are formed of necessity. Other communities establish multilevel classrooms because of the advantages they offer learners, teachers, and parents. Research says that students should be in a multilevel classroom for at least two years to take advantage of the benefits.

How can my daughter learn what she needs to when there are so many other grades in her classroom?

Students in multilevel classrooms are assessed according to provincial learning outcomes. This means that they are guided to set learning goals that meet their learning needs, as well as curricular outcomes. Teachers guide students along their learning journey as they work in groups and individually to study a broad topic that addresses many subjects. Students work at their own level on different projects about the same topic. They become *independent together* as they grow in confidence, gain a deeper understanding from a wide age range of learners, and develop skills and strategies. Grades become benchmarks for final assessments at the end of a unit, term, or school year.

How will learning in this classroom be challenging for my daughter when she is in her third year?

Teachers in multilevel classrooms design a range of learning experiences so that students at every developmental level are challenged. Because different themes rotate over the years, there is little or no repetition of content. Experienced students generally are independent learners and ready for more complex tasks. Furthermore, in their last year(s) in multilevel programming, students gain valuable experience in exercising leadership and acting as mentors.

My son is working with students who are younger than he is. How does this affect his learning?

Older students become role models for younger classmates in multilevel classrooms. This may provide opportunities to practise learning or to present a project with an appreciative younger audience. These opportunities are valuable and enriching learning experiences as older students grow in knowledge and confidence, and become “teachers,” too.

What if my son has a conflict with the teacher or a peer and has to stay in his class for three years?

The multilevel classroom may offer individuals time to learn to understand each other and work out any difficulties that may occur. Within a learning community, conflicts are often resolved as they are in everyday living because of the respect and values that develop over time. In some cases, both parties may need to agree on a plan to accept and respect differences.

In a multilevel class my son will have fewer friends his own age. How will this affect him?

In the multilevel classroom, students establish valuable friendships with others of the same age as well as with younger and older students. The fluid student makeup of a multilevel classroom is sometimes an advantage. Rather than being limited to the same peer group for several years, students may gradually be introduced to new classmates.

After my daughter has had the same teacher in the multilevel classroom for several years, how will moving to a new school affect her?

Research shows that students in multilevel classrooms tend to be more socially adept and more positive about school. These traits can equip students in dealing with the challenge of moving to a new classroom.

What will happen if we transfer to a new school during the time my daughter is in the multilevel classroom?

The learning of all Manitoba students is based on the same learning outcomes, regardless of whether they are in a multilevel or single-grade classroom. So students may explore different topics from one classroom to another, but the learning outcomes are the same for everyone. Students who move from multilevel classrooms to a new school usually take with them portfolios, learning logs, and goal sheets, which provide powerful evidence of what they know and can do.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth; Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community. Available online <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/multilevel/>

