

**A CASE STUDY OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING IN CANADA:
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

SALOSHINI MUTHAYAN

October 1999

ABSTRACT

This study examines multigrade teaching in selected schools in Canada and its implications for improving multigrade teaching in South Africa, where over 50 % of primary schools are multigrade and the teachers have not received preparation in multigrade teaching.

The case study method was adopted because it allowed for 'an intensive, holistic description and analysis' of the multigrade classroom. The approach is interpretivist, based on the assumption that social phenomena are 'socially constituted' and 'valuationally based'. Research techniques included a literature review, interviews and observations. Four classrooms with grade combinations ranging from two grades to eight grades (Kindergarten to grade 7) were studied.

Despite problems such as the lack of official recognition, inadequate teacher education and support - problems common to both Canada and South Africa - the Canadian teachers managed their classrooms effectively. This was indicated by their understanding of the children's needs, their integration of the curriculum for teaching across the grades and the learning areas, their use of effective instructional strategies and their involvement of parents in the classroom.

A reason for their success may be that their teacher education includes child-centred, activity based approaches, integration of the curriculum, critical thinking, flexibility and effective instructional strategies, which they may adapt for effective multigrade teaching.

The study found that successful multigrade teaching depended on the teacher. For South Africa, this may imply that intervention programmes should focus on relevant preparation and support for multigrade teachers. The emphasis on material resources in the implementation of *Curriculum 2005* has not been balanced with adequate training on policy, curriculum and instructional strategies. Teacher education should include methodologies that are experiential, reflective and participatory. A variety of instructional strategies should be employed in the multigrade classroom.

The respondents in the study believed further that multigrade teaching is more beneficial than single-grade teaching because it caters for the diversity of needs amongst children and allows for peer tutoring, thereby exploiting Vygotsky's theory of the 'zone of proximal development'. Thus, instead of viewing multigrade teaching as a temporary phenomenon, it should be viewed as an opportunity for improving school effectiveness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES AND PHOTOGRAPHS	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	x
GLOSSARY	xi
LIST OF RESPONDENTS	xviii

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE	INTRODUCTION	1
1.	PURPOSE	1
2.	DEFINITION OF TERMS	1
3.	BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	3
	3.1 History and Prevalence Internationally	5
4.	OBJECTIVES	8
5.	A REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE	9
	5.1 Literature Search Procedures	10
	5.2 Inclusion Criteria	11
6.	OUTLINE OF THE THESIS	12
CHAPTER TWO	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	13
1.	METHODOLOGY	13
2.	METHOD	15
3.	TECHNIQUES	17
	3.1 The Literature Review	17
	3.2 Interviews and Observations	18
	3.2.1 Interviews	18
	3.2.2 Observations	20
4.	PILOT STUDY	22
5.	SELECTION OF CLASSROOMS AND RESPONDENTS	22
	5.1 Selection of the Classrooms	22
	5.1.1 Criteria for selection	23
	5.1.2 Procedures	23
	5.2 Selection of the Respondents	23
6.	LOCATION OF SCHOOLS	25
7.	BIAS	25
8.	ASSUMPTIONS	26
9.	DELIMITATIONS	27
10.	LIMITATIONS	28
11.	ISSUES OF VALIDITY	28
12.	THE DATA	30
	12.1 Data Collection and Analysis	31
	12.2 Presentation of the Findings	34
13.	REFLECTIONS ON THE METHODOLOGY	35

PART TWO

CHAPTER THREE	STATUS AND CONTEXT	38
1.	STATUS	38
	1.1 Use of terms	41
	1.2 History	47
	1.3 Prevalence	48
2.	CONTEXT	51
	2.1 Urban-Rural Spread	51
	2.2 Facilities and Resources	52
	2.3 Class Size and Grade Combination	54
	2.4 Teacher Preparation and Experience	55
	2.4.1 Teacher Preparation	55
	2.4.2 Teacher Experience	57
	2.5 Teacher Support	59
CHAPTER FOUR	CLASSROOM ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT	62
1.	PLANNING	62
2.	ENVIRONMENT	65
	2.1 Physical Space and Equipment	65
	2.2 Seating and Grouping Arrangements	66
	2.3 Materials	67
3.	DISCIPLINE	68
	3.1 Role Modelling	68
	3.2 Learner Participation in Setting Classroom Rules	70
	3.3 Clearly Defined Teacher Expectations	70
	3.4 Classroom Monitors	71
CHAPTER FIVE	CURRICULUM ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT	72
1.	THE CURRICULUM AND MULTIGRADE TEACHING	72
2.	CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH	76
3.	INTEGRATION	78
	3.1 Integration of the Grades	78
	3.1.1 Different expectations for different children	79
	3.2 Integration Across the Curriculum	80
4.	RELEVANCE	82
5.	INCLUSION	84
6.	ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING	85
	6.1 Assessment Methods	85
	6.1.1 Observations	88
	6.1.2 Portfolios	89
	6.1.3 Peer Evaluation and Self Evaluation	91

6.2	Reporting	92
6.2.1	Conferences	93
6.2.2	Written Reports	94
6.2.3	Brag Nights	94
CHAPTER SIX	TEACHING APPROACH AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES	97
1.	TEACHING APPROACH	97
1.1	Theoretical Frameworks	97
1.1.1	Piaget	97
1.1.2	Bandura	98
1.1.3	Vygotsky	98
1.1.4	Erikson	99
1.1.5	Bronfenbrenner	99
1.1.6	Bruner	99
1.1.7	Montessori	100
1.2	Child-centred Approach	100
1.2.1	The needs and interests of the child	103
1.2.2	Learner paced approach	103
1.2.3	Rote learning	103
1.2.4	Participatory Approach	104
1.2.5	Teacher Qualities	104
2.	INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES	107
2.1	Thematic Teaching	107
2.2	Grouping	107
2.2.1	Cooperative learning	107
2.2.2	Whole group instruction	109
2.2.3	Small groups	110
2.3	Peer Tutoring	114
2.4	Self-directed Learning	116
2.5	Individualised Teaching	116
2.6	Learning Centres	117
2.7	Team Teaching	118
CHAPTER SEVEN	PARENT SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT	120
1.	PARENT SUPPORT	120
2.	PARENT INVOLVEMENT	124
CHAPTER EIGHT	COGNITIVE AND NON-COGNITIVE EFFECTS OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING	128
1.	COGNITIVE EFFECTS	128
2.	NON-COGNITIVE EFFECTS	133

CHAPTER NINE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING 136

1.	ADVANTAGES	136
1.1	Family-like, Nurturing Environment	136
1.1.1	Social interaction	137
1.2	Diversity	138
1.2.1	Mixed ability	138
1.2.2	Cultural diversity	139
1.2.3	Special educational needs	140
1.3	Role Modelling	141
1.4	Enhancements to the Teaching and Learning Process	142
1.4.1	Programme diversity	142
1.4.2	Forced to plan	143
1.4.3	Continuity	143
1.4.4	Discipline	143
1.5	Children as Indicators of Outcomes and Achievements	144
2.	DISADVANTAGES	148
2.1	Primary and Intermediate Grade Combinations	148
2.2	Increased Workload for the Teachers	148
2.3	A Challenging Programme for Advanced Learners	149
2.4	Parents Concerns and Fears	149
2.5	Children from Dysfunctional Families	150
2.6	Teacher may not be Specialised in all Learning Areas	150

CHAPTER TEN THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL MULTIGRADE TEACHING 155

1.	THE TEACHER	155
1.1	Good Organisation and Planning	155
1.2	Clearly Defined Routines and Expectations	156
1.3	A Good Knowledge of the Children's Needs, the Curriculum and Instructional Strategies	156
1.4	Peer Tutoring as an Effective Strategy	156
1.5	Positive Attitudes	157
1.6	Good Qualities	158
2.	TEACHER EDUCATION AND A SUPPORTIVE PRINCIPAL	158
3.	PARENT INVOLVEMENT	158

PART THREE

CHAPTER ELEVEN	CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	161
1.	CONCLUSIONS	161
1.1	Teacher Education	164
1.2	The Policy of a Child-centred Approach	166
2.	IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA	168
2.1	<i>“The teacher is the biggest thing”</i>	171
2.2	<i>Teach teachers the way you want them to teach</i>	171
2.3	<i>Policy for All (PFA)</i>	171
2.4	<i>Policy cannot be imposed; it must match the socio-economic system</i>	172
2.5	<i>Support means support</i>	173
2.6	<i>There is no substitute for good planning</i>	173
2.7	<i>Variety is the spice of life</i>	174
2.8	<i>Multigrade means better pupil:teacher ratios</i>	174
2.9	<i>Materials are an aid not a substitute for good teaching</i>	174
2.10	<i>“Teachers must know the curriculum inside out and upside down”</i>	175
3.	CONCLUSION: <i>Multigrade teaching – not merely an alternative but a good alternative at that.</i>	176
4.	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	178
4.1	Canada	178
4.2	South Africa	179
	REFERENCES	180
ANNEXURE A	Interview Schedules	188
ANNEXURE B	Sample of Interview Transcripts	189
ANNEXURE C	Observation Schedule	190
ANNEXURE D	Sample of Observation Field-notes	191
ANNEXURE E	Questionnaires	192
ANNEXURE F	Letter – Seeking permission to visit schools	193
ANNEXURE G	Consent Form	194
ANNEXURE H	Sample of Planning	195
ANNEXURE I	Sample of Benchmarks for Assessment	196
ANNEXURE J	Sample of Progress Reports	197
ANNEXURE K	Sample of Policy	198

LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

TABLES

Table 1:	Number of respondents and classrooms observed	25
Table 2:	Grade combinations, age range and class size	25

FIGURES

Figure 1:	Triangulation of research techniques	17
Figure 2:	Triangulation of sources	20
Figure 3:	K to 7 Classroom layout	65

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1:	Buddy reading	66
Photo 2:	Concrete materials to teach math	68
Photo 3:	Role modelling	69
Photo 4:	Portfolio collection	90
Photo 5:	Whole group instruction	109
Photo 6:	Mixed groups	111
Photo 7:	Peer tutoring	115
Photo 8:	Parent involvement	125
Photo 9:	Family-like interaction	137

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my mother and my aunt who took turns to care for my home and family so that I could undertake this research study together with my other work commitments. They have always been there for me and this thesis would not have been accomplished without their selfless love and support.

I am grateful to my dedicated husband who encouraged and supported me throughout this process and who assisted in the proof reading of this thesis. I am especially indebted to my two children who have not only inspired my career in education but have taught me so much of what I know about education.

My sincere gratitude to all the respondents in this study for sharing so freely with me their rich knowledge and experience. I am deeply grateful to each one of them.

Lastly, I would like to thank my supervisors for their kindness, flexibility, guidance and support. I have enjoyed every moment of being supervised by them.

GLOSSARY

- Brag Nights :** An evening where families visit the classroom for a display and celebration of the children's achievements.
- British Columbia :** A province on the west coast of Canada. Selected for this study because the provincial curriculum closely resembles the new national South African curriculum, *Curriculum 2005*.
- British Columbia Primary Teachers' Association :** A Professional Specialist Association of the British Columbia Teachers' Association.
- Buddy System :** A reading system whereby older or more competent children assist other children in their reading.
- Child :** The term 'child' was preferred to the term 'learner' because it is a more holistic and inclusive term of the persona referred to. Learner appears to be limited in that it refers to children within one capacity only, namely as learners in an educational process. On the other hand, the concept of the child encompasses all aspects of the child as a person, including his or her role as a learner.
- Child-centred :** A philosophical approach that views the child as the centre of the teaching and learning process. Central to this approach is the account taken of the needs and interests of child in the design of the teaching and learning programme.
- Cognitive effects :** The intellectual development of the learner indicated by concept acquisition, intellectual maturity and academic performance.
- Conferences :** Two-way teacher-led conferences between the teacher and the parents, to discuss the child's work, progress, parent expectations and goal setting for continual learning in the forthcoming period.

	Three-way student-led conferences between the student, teacher and parents, to discuss the child's work, progress, parent expectations and goal setting for continual learning in the forthcoming period.
Continuous Assessment :	The process of gathering evidence of the processes and products of the student's learning. Authentic evidence of what the learner can do and how the learner goes about doing it.
Cooperative Learning :	An instructional technique where students work in a group small enough for each student to participate in a clearly assigned collective task, without supervision from the teacher. The group has a common goal and they learn that they have to work together to achieve it. This encourages higher order thinking and promotes prosocial behaviour. This term should not be confused with mere co-operation.
Critical Thinking :	A process where learners understand the changing nature of knowledge, critically analyse and interpret information, solve problems and make decisions.
Curriculum 2005 :	The South African national curriculum gazetted in 1997.
Developmentally Appropriate Practice :	The label given to curriculum and instructional strategies that are individualised and child-centred by National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, D.C.
Diversity :	Learners of differing ability, age, grade, culture, religion, gender, race and socio-economic background.
Education For All (EFA):	The international goal of working towards basic education for all by the year 2000, adopted by 186 countries at the international conference in Jomtien in 1990.

Ethic of Care :	The term used by one of the respondents to define and describe good management through professional commitment and dedication.
Family Grouping :	A term used to describe mixed age grouping where the notion of family values of caring, sharing and respect are basic tenets. Its history probably goes back to the rural one-roomed school where all the children of families in the area were placed in the one-roomed school, regardless of any differences in age.
First Nations :	The indigenous peoples of Canada. 'Band' refers to a particular group of the First Nations people.
First Nations Support Worker :	A category of support teachers available to the school to support the transition of First Nation students in the schooling system.
Grids :	Formats for planning lessons according to the phase and programme organisers in <i>Curriculum 2005</i> .
Inclusion :	The inclusion of children with differing needs in the regular schooling system through adapting the system to suit the needs of the individual children and not vice-versa. This requires a flexible curriculum, teaching methodology, support services and an accessible environment.
Individualised Learning :	Teachers instructing individual students on a one to one basis. This should not be confused with self-directed learning (see below).
Integration :	The combining of grades or subjects/learning areas for instruction. The continuity and transition of learning between the home/ school environment is dealt with under 'Relevance' in this thesis.

Integrated Resource Packages : (IRPs)	Support materials for the implementation of the Primary Program, which were graded usually and hence, could not support the implementation of a non-graded approach.
Intermediate :	In British Columbia, 'intermediate' refers to grades 4 to 6
Inuit :	A First Nations group, sometimes referred to as Eskimos, who inhabit the colder arctic regions of Canada.
Know-Wonder Learning Web :	In designing the curriculum programme lessons, teachers enquire from the children 'what they know' and 'what they wonder about'. This helps them to determine the children's prior knowledge and their interests for planning a programme to meet the children's needs and interests.
Learner :	In <i>Curriculum 2005</i> , the term 'learner' is used to refer to the child, pupil, scholar or student in the school setting. At times, the teacher is also referred to as a learner within the teaching and learning process.
Learning Centres :	Areas within the classroom that have been designed for children to engage in either group or self-directed activities with little to no supervision from the teacher. Centres may include, book areas, a science center and creative/construction areas.
Learning Logs :	The children keep a record of their own activities and progress, usually in a file.
Metacognition :	The process of teaching children about thinking as well as how to think. It includes an awareness of different ways of thinking, evaluating one's thinking processes and the application of thinking to other situations.

Multiage :

A form of teaching in which a single teacher teaches children of differing ages and grade levels in one classroom, usually for educational or pedagogical reasons. It is grounded in research that child development and learning emerges on a timeline which is unique for each child and is associated with developmentally appropriate education, constructivist approaches and continuous progress. The term multiage is close to the concept of ungraded, non-graded, vertical age grouping, family grouping and mixed age grouping.

Multigrade :

A form of teaching in which a single teacher teaches children of two or more grades in one classroom, usually for administrative reasons such as enrolment numbers. This term is close in concept to split grade or combination classrooms.

Multiple intelligences :

The recognition that there are several cognitive processes operating at different levels at any one time and that the teaching and learning programme should take this into account.

Non-graded Organisation :

The departure from the traditional graded organisation of the curriculum into grade levels, designed to accommodate learning rates and styles which occur naturally among children. It closely resembles multi-age grouping.

Non-cognitive Effects :

The social and emotional development of the student indicated by psycho-social factors such as independence, self esteem, social skills responsibility and co-operation.

Observations :	An assessment method where the teacher observes the processes and products of the child's learning.
One-roomed school :	The traditional rural school in North America, where one teacher was responsible for the education of children of mixed grades and ages in one classroom.
Outcomes-based Education :	An education system where the exit points (outputs or results) rather than the entry points are clearly defined in the form of expected outcomes for the learners. The emphasis is on the teaching and learning processes rather than on content.
Participatory Learning :	The active and conscious involvement of learners in the teaching and learning process. This may include their participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the teaching and learning programme.
Peer Mentoring :	Students mentor each other spontaneously and informally as the need arises. This may include older children mentoring younger children or more competent children mentoring others. Usually, it is initiated by those in need, who request help from their peers.
Peer Tutoring :	As opposed to the above, this form of peer assistance usually is initiated formally by the teacher, who may prompt children to seek the help of particular individuals or prompt individuals to assist others.
Portfolios :	A collection of authentic artifacts or samples of the student's work that provides a deeper, more thorough picture of his/her abilities. Portfolio collection should be continuous and ongoing.
Primary :	In British Columbia, primary refers to kindergarten to grade three.

Primary Program :	The British Columbia primary curriculum for kindergarten to grade 3.
Professional Development Day :	In British Columbia, approximately seven days are set aside for professional development of the primary teachers. Schools may decide what the programme for professional development may entail.
Recess :	Interval or break times during the school day.
Relevance	The curriculum must be appropriate to the needs, interests and context of the learners for meaningful and optimal learning to occur. The students should be encouraged to integrate and apply their learning across different environments and situations.
Rote Learning :	Memorisation without understanding.
Self-directed Learning :	Learners engage in activities individually and independently. Usually the programme or materials should cater for this kind of self-instruction.
Special Educational Needs :	An umbrella term referring to children with special or differing needs (including disabled and gifted children), either permanently or at some stage in their lives.
Thematic Teaching :	A concept or area of interest that becomes a focus for planning a learning programme or lesson. If properly employed, it may be used as a vehicle for the integration of the different learning areas or subjects in the curriculum.
Whole Group Instruction :	The teaching of the entire class or group together.
Small Group Instruction :	The class is divided into small groups on the basis of needs, interests, ability or size for the purpose of instruction.

LIST OF RESPONDENTS

LIST OF RESPONDENTS

<u>NAME</u>	<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>TRANSCRIPT ANNEXURE*</u>
Larkin, M.	Teacher	B-6
Lawson, S.	Teacher	B-7
Oldman, V.	Teacher	B-5
Stone, T.	Teacher	B-3
Taft, S.	Teacher	B-4
Greene, L.	Support Teacher	B-8
Stampier, E.	Support Teacher	B-9
Forester, K.	Principal	B-1
Hines, J.	Principal	B-2
Becker, J.	Parent	B-14
Bellini, G.	Parent	B-13
Canon, P.	Parent	B-10
Dean, D.	Parent	B-11
Hill, H.	Parent	B-16
Penny, S.	Parent	B-12
Sauer, L.	Parent	B-20
Wren, M.	Parent	B-15
Chapman, M.	Researcher	B-17, B-18
Ministry officials	Education Ministry	B-19

* All transcripts have not been annexed hereto but are available on request. Only a sample of the transcripts is annexed to this thesis .

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine multigrade teaching in selected schools in British Columbia, Canada and its implications for improving multigrade teaching in South Africa, where primary education is characterised by a high incidence of drop out, repetition and out-of-school children (Padayachie *et al* 1994:5; Edusource 1994). It is estimated that over 50% of schools in South Africa are multigrade (EMIS 1997). The majority of these schools are located in marginalised, rural areas and the teachers have not received any preparation or support in multigrade teaching.

2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

It may be necessary to clarify the terminology used in this study at the onset because it was found that the terms 'multigrade' and 'multiage' were used interchangeably by most of the respondents and some experts in the literature review, even though these terms can and do mean different things. In this thesis, I have chosen to explore briefly this apparent confusion of the terms because I believe that it describes the context of multigrade/multiage teaching and is indicative of its low status in British Columbia, Canada.

Multigrade teaching may be defined as "...a form of teaching in which a single teacher teaches children of two or more grades..." (UNESCO 1988:1), usually for administrative reasons such as student numbers and financial constraints. The respective grade levels are retained, as are the grade specific curricula (Veenman 1995:319). On the other hand, multiage teaching is the vertical age grouping within the classroom where children of different ages and grade levels are mixed for

perceived educational and pedagogical benefits (Ibid.). The grades and curricula are integrated. This should not be confused with some cases in South Africa where there may be multiple ages of children in a single grade classroom. In this thesis, the former definition of multiage is used, namely, children of several ages and grade levels integrated in one classroom.

In certain developed countries, the term 'multigrade' is considered closest in concept to the terms split grade or combination classes, while 'multiage' is similar to the terms mixed age, ungraded or nongraded (Regional Laboratory study 1994:1-2). According to a UNESCO (1995a:1) report, the terms multigrade and multiage are not necessarily the best terms to use when translated into other languages.

In the developed countries, multigrade classrooms are formed usually to assist administrators to cope with uneven class sizes and declining enrolments in urban and rural areas (Veenman 1995:319). In the developing countries of Asia, Africa and South America, multigrade classrooms are formed usually to assist in attempts to achieve the goal of universal primary Education for All (EFA)¹, within the context of

¹ The goal of achieving basic education for all by the year 2000, was adopted by 155 countries at the 1990 World Conference in Jomtien conference. This was a reaffirmation of the earlier, 1948 UN declaration for Universal Primary Education and the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child (Prather 1993:3).

large classes and the shortage of teachers in both urban and rural areas (UNESCO 1995a:44; UNESCO 1995b:2,42). Multiage classes, which are formed for perceived educational benefits in developed countries, are not evident usually in developing countries.

For the purpose of this study, the term 'multigrade' is used to refer to both 'multigrade' and 'multiage' teaching, except where a specific distinction between the terms is warranted or where direct quotations of the respondents or literature review are referred to. The issue of terminology will be discussed further in chapter three.

3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

My involvement in national education policy development in 1993 and 1994 brought about an awareness of the need for improving teaching and learning effectiveness in multigrade classrooms. The terms 'multigrade' and 'multiage' were not in use at the time because this form of teaching had not been recognised as a distinctive teaching phenomenon in South Africa. The term 'farm schools' was used to refer to small schools located on farms but there was no special nomenclature for "multigrade" schools. A literature search showed no evidence of research in this area in South Africa² and there was a dearth of literature on this subject available in South Africa.

Through my involvement in national curriculum development between 1994 to 1997, I realised that the new policy presented an opportunity to promote multigrade teaching formally. This policy emphasised the learners' progress according to individual potential and pegged the assessment criteria at the end of the phases,

² Only one study on nongraded schooling, which was not relevant to my study, was found: "Geindividualiseerde onderwys: 'n herevaluerende van histories-toonaangewende perspektiewe" (Rossouw 1994).

instead of grades, thereby affording the learner the flexibility to develop at his/her own pace within the phase. This approach was compatible with multigrade teaching.

In 1997, as a member of the Minister of Education's Technical Committee, responsible for writing the new national school curriculum, I drafted a section on multigrade teaching for inclusion in the introductory section of the curriculum document. The draft was not included in the published version of the curriculum because the new curriculum itself introduced a major paradigm shift inviting much controversy and the inclusion of a section on multigrade teaching, an unresearched area at that point, might have been untimely. Hence, the education policy initiatives of the new Government have made no reference to multigrade teaching. Notwithstanding this, the issue of multigrade classrooms began to emerge at meetings held to publicise the new curriculum.

My attempt to undertake a participatory, action research study in multigrade teaching in 1995 had to be abandoned because of a lack of funding. Instead, I decided to embark on an academic quest to enhance my own knowledge and understanding of multigrade teaching.

Since I had limited access to multigrade literature in South Africa, I considered it appropriate to study international endeavours. I initially decided that a comparison of multigrade teaching in a developing and in a developed world context might illuminate some of the problems confronting multigrade teaching in South Africa.

The Indian context was chosen because of the high incidence of multigrade teaching in India and because its context of poverty and the lack of adequate resources resembled that of the majority of people in South Africa. The Canadian context was chosen because of the incidence of multigrade teaching there and because its curriculum closely resembled the new South African curriculum.

After having undertaken the field research in India and Canada, it was decided to limit this study to the Canadian context for two reasons in main: the scope of the findings exceeded the limitations of this thesis and, secondly, whereas the Indian findings were similar to the problems encountered in multigrade teaching in South Africa, the Canadian findings appeared to be more useful when considering the implications for South Africa.

3.1 History and Prevalence Internationally

The literature review showed that multigrade teaching has a long history and is prevalent throughout the world both in developed and developing countries such as Canada, the United States, the Netherlands, Australia, India, China, Indonesia, Columbia, Togo and Zambia. In Canada, one out of every seven classrooms is multigrade (Gajadharsingh 1991:1), while in India, almost eight out of ten classrooms are multigrade (UNESCO 1988:1).

Multigrade teaching in India harks back to ancient times (Little 1995:1; Nagaraju 1997:5; Sharma *et al* 1997:5,8,9), while in Canada it has been in existence for over a century (Forester 1998:14(B-1)³; Lawson 1998:3(B-7)).

³ B-1 denotes interview transcript annexure.

In the United States and Canada, education initially took place in small, one-roomed schools until the introduction of graded classrooms, following the visit of an American Secretary of Education, Mann, to Prussia in 1843 (Pratt, as quoted in Fogarty 1993:45). Mann reported that :

...the first element of superiority in a Prussian school...consists in the proper classification of scholars. In places where the numbers sufficiently allow it, the children are divided according to ages and attainments, and a single teacher has the charge of only a single class... There is no obstacle whatever...to the introduction at once of this mode of dividing and classifying scholars in all our large towns...

(Pratt, as quoted in Fogarty1993:45)

Mann's report led to schools in America being

...divided along the lines of age and grade... The mono-grade model was to become a universal ideal in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and came to dominate the basis of school, class and curriculum organisation...

(Little 1995:1)

In this century, however, some education philosophers and reformers, including Montessori, Pestalozzi and Dewey, have espoused the benefits of the mixed age grouping (Lodish 1992:20). Since the 1930s, the limitations of rigidly graded systems have received increasing scrutiny. In response to this, educators in the developed world have introduced more flexible organisational systems (Ibid.). During the education reforms of the 1970s and the advent of open education, multigrade classrooms received renewed attention (Veenman 1995:320).

Although administrative imperatives such as financial cuts, declining enrolments due to changing birth rates and population shifts from urban to suburban areas have led to an increase in multigrade classes in many instances, educators are beginning to see the positive aspects of multigrade classrooms. Chapman (1995:416) cites the works of Vygotsky (1978), Katz *et al* (1990) and Lodish (1992) in support of her claim that

“...multiage classes are becoming more popular both in the United States and Canada as we move towards more child-centred and developmental approaches to education.”

In the United States, the state legislatures of Kentucky, Mississippi and Oregon “...have mandated multiage classes for grades K to 3...” (Lodish 1992:20-21). Pennsylvania, Florida, Alaska, Georgia, California, Texas, Tennessee and New York were reported to have been developing similar programmes (Ibid.).

According to Pratt and Treacy (as quoted in Veenman 1995:321), “Over 85% of elementary schools in Western Australia employ some form of multigrade grouping...”. One of the most populous states in Australia, Victoria, has made a policy decision that multigrade teaching should occur in all first three grades “...just because multigrade teaching (is) believed to be the best form of education for children.” (UNESCO 1995b:13). In New Zealand, a third of the schools are one or two teacher schools (Veenman 1995:321). In the Netherlands, “...53% of the elementary school teachers have multigrade classes...” while “...23% of all classes in Switzerland are multigrade...” (Veenman 1995:320). Multigrade classrooms also exist in Columbia, Burkina Faso, Uganda and Zambia (Miller 1991; Little 1995; Veenman 1995).

It is evident from this brief overview that multigrade classes are not simply an experimental feature of education, occurring in the remote areas of a few countries. On the contrary, it has been and continues to be a significant feature of education systems in industrialised and developing countries such as Canada and India respectively, and in both sparsely and densely populated countries such as the Maldives and China.

Despite its long history and widespread occurrence throughout the world, little attention has been accorded to multigrade teaching by researchers, education ministries, teacher education institutions and teacher organisations. As one Canadian researcher observed, "...it has been a well kept secret... 'officially' they do not appear to exist." (Mulcahy 1993:25).

The incidence of multigrade teaching at the primary school level in South Africa and the likelihood that it could be a permanent feature of the education system implies that more attention ought to be given to this teaching phenomenon.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study has two objectives. Firstly, to examine the characteristic features of multigrade teaching in Canada with regard to the following:

- a.) status and context
- b.) teacher education and support
- c.) classroom organisation and management
- d.) the curriculum
- e.) teaching methodology and instructional strategies
- f.) parent involvement
- g.) perceived cognitive and non-cognitive benefits
- h.) the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade teaching
- i.) the key to successful multigrade teaching.

Secondly, to consider any implications for multigrade teaching in South Africa.

5. A REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

An extensive review was conducted of literature related to this study which was obtained from sources overseas. Reference will be limited to authors I have identified as crucial to the area under discussion in this thesis.

The related literature will not be dealt with separately but will be discussed in the body of the thesis. It is hoped that this approach will demonstrate more convincingly the relation to the sections under discussion. This, I believe, is more effective since it allows the literature review, as a research technique, to come alive in the text. There is support for this approach in the following statement by Wolcott:

...there is no iron-clad rule...that chapter two *must* be a literature review...I expect my students to know the relevant literature, but I do not want them to lump (dump?) it all into a chapter that remains unconnected to the rest of the study. I want them to draw selectively and appropriately as needed in the telling of their story. In our descriptive and analytic accounts, the most appropriate place for examining the literature seems to me to be in consort with the analysis of new data.

(Wolcott 1990:17)

It was found that most of the studies reviewed were quantitative studies. Some of these have made significant contributions to the body of knowledge on multigrade teaching, especially with regard to the quantitative data on the prevalence of multigrade teaching and the cognitive and non-cognitive impact of multigrade teaching in comparison to single grade teaching (Gajadharsingh 1991; Miller 1991,1995; Veenman 1995). However, there are limitations in some of these studies. These limitations will be discussed in the sections where they arise.

5.1 Literature Search Procedures

As noted, there is a dearth of literature on this topic in South Africa. An initial search was undertaken using, as the principle source, the Erudite Information System (EIS) on Sabinet, the South African universities' computer network. This search provided very limited literature of multigrade studies conducted worldwide. Only one South African study, in Afrikaans, on nongraded schooling was retrieved.

It was found that research into this area of study has been limited, even on an international scale. Veenman (1995:319) observes that "...there are only a few comprehensive reviews on this topic." The reason for this may be a bias in favour of single-grade schools in the traditional education systems throughout the world (Mulcahy 1993:25-26; Little 1995:1).

An extensive search was conducted using the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) as a principle source. Most of the literature identified through this search was acquired through a visit to the Ontario Institute for Science and Education (OISE) in Toronto, Canada. Other sources were obtained from personnel in UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. The reference lists, in some of the initial literature obtained, were used to identify further sources. In some instances, the institutions or authors were contacted directly. The literature on multigrade teaching in India was acquired through a visit to the National Institute for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in New Delhi, India.

No restriction was placed on the location of the studies or dates of the publications. Some 60 sources of literature on the multigrade classroom were accessed and reviewed.

Most of these were either research studies or reviews of research published in education journals. The remaining sources were reports published by UNESCO.

5.2 Inclusion Criteria

The following descriptors were used to search for and include literature for this review: 'multigrade', 'multiage', 'mixed age', 'split classrooms', 'combination classes', 'vertical age grouping', 'ungraded', 'nongraded', 'farm schools' and 'out-of-school children'. The latter descriptor was used since it was assumed that programmes for out-of-school children may follow a multigrade approach.

The relevance of the literature to this study was determined further by their inclusion of the following aspects of multigrade teaching: definition and use of terms; the history and prevalence of multigrade classrooms around the world; the organisation and management of multigrade classrooms; curriculum and materials; the teaching approach and methods; parent and community support and involvement and the impact of multigrade teaching on the children, both cognitively and non-cognitively.

Although the review included multigrade teaching around the world, in this thesis it will be limited to the Canadian studies (Gajadharsingh, Chapman, Mulcahy, Gomulchuk and Piland and Craig and McLellan) and notable and useful international studies by researchers such as Veenman, Miller, Lodish, Pratt, Little, Bacharach *et al* and Chase and Doan.

6. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This thesis has three parts. Part One consists of two chapters. Chapter one, an introduction, defines the problem to be investigated and its importance, clarifies the use of the terms multigrade and multiage, sketches the background and context of the problem and introduces the review of related literature. Chapter two, Research Methodology, deals with the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study, the research method, techniques, procedures, validity and finally, reflections on the methodology - a discussion of the methodological dilemma encountered by the researcher.

Part Two, the main part of the thesis, consists of chapters three to ten and deals with the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Part Three consists of chapter eleven which is entitled 'Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations for Further Research'. This chapter summarises the key findings, discusses the implications of the study for South Africa and suggests areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. METHODOLOGY

This research was aimed at gaining an understanding of an alternative approach to traditional single-grade teaching, namely multigrade teaching, in another country. Research of this social nature is value laden and a positivist approach, which seeks to be value-free and to quantify and explain social phenomenon, would have been inappropriate. According to Hesse (as quoted in Lather 1986:257), "The attempt to produce value neutral social science is increasingly being abandoned as at best unrealizable, and at worst self-deceptive... ." An interpretivist approach was considered more appropriate since "...we are all rooted in a social world that is socially constructed." (Banister *et al* 1994:175). This approach allowed me to take account of the social context within which the multigrade classrooms operate so that the data could be hermeneutically analysed since "...its principle is with an understanding of the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he or she finds himself or herself." (Cohen and Manion 1989:8).

My ontological and epistemological assumptions are that truth is relative, knowledge is constructed and everything is an interpretation. According to Schwandt (1994:119), "...the goal of (interpretivism) ...is the grasping or understanding (*Verstehen*) of 'meaning' of social phenomena". For me, the word 'grasping' adequately conveys my own belief and understanding of my research undertaking. Unlike the positivist enquirer, I do not presume to explain scientifically "...the complex world of lived experience..." of the multigrade teacher in Canada (Schwandt

1994:118). This methodological stance, however, has created a slight dilemma for me, which I shall discuss at the end of this chapter.

The interpretive approach is based on the assumption that basic reality is not external to the multigrade classroom and that rather than gathering data to validate a theory, the "...theory is emergent and ...'grounded' on data generated by the research act." (Cohen and Manion 1989:39).

According to Walsh educational theory is:

...to be generated from, and tested in, practice...The first task of theory, then, is to *make some body of tacit 'theory' explicit*, perhaps in association with case studies of particular practitioners in action...
(Walsh 1993:44)

Thus, "On the one hand, then, theory is to be a critical guide for practice, while on the other hand it is methodologically and epistemologically dependent on practice!" (Walsh 1993:45). In his discourse on theories, Walsh (1993:54) points out that while "...we may aspire to build broad and stable highways....we are unlikely to achieve more than unsteady rope bridges." He explains further that "What the nature of education obliges us to is a *quest* for coherence rather than the final achievement of coherence" (Ibid.). Similarly, this study is a quest for a better understanding of multigrade teaching rather than to make a pronouncement on multigrade teaching.

2. METHOD

I am aware that in the research literature, there is no consistency in the use of the terms 'methods' and 'techniques'. Some researchers differentiate between methods (surveys, case studies and action research) and techniques (interviews, observations and questionnaires), while others categorise them all as methods (Cohen and Manion 1989:41,307; Banister *et al* 1994:17; McKernan 1996:75). In this study, I use the former approach. Perhaps it is not so much what we call them, but rather their congruency that matters most.

Powney and Watts (1987:178-9), argue for 'methodological congruity', in other words, the methods or techniques used "...should be congruent with a set of principles or philosophical assumptions." Schwandt (1994:119) cautions that "...a focus on methods (techniques for gathering and analysing data) often masks a full understanding of the relationship between method and inquiry purpose." Having said this, it may be claimed, from the perspective of ontological hermeneutics that the 'correctness' of the application of method "...is meant as an aid to good judgment." (Schwandt 1994:122). The application of method is to "...guide the making of an ethical decision (interpretation) in a concrete situation..." (Madison, cited in Schwandt 1994:122).

In order to make meaning of the multigrade teachers' world, I listened to their views about and watched their actions in their world, namely the multigrade classroom. The case study method was chosen so that a selection of multigrade classrooms in Canada could be studied. A case study allows for an examination of a 'bounded system', a specific phenomenon, program, process, event or institution (Merriam

1988:9). In my case, the multigrade classrooms in the selected schools constituted that 'bounded system'.

Merriam (1988:16), defines the case study as "...an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple sources."

According to Walsh (1993:40), recent trends in educational theory have led to the demystification of education so that the artificial separation of expert from practitioner and a practitioner from students and parents has been severed. For educational research, this trend and the current emphasis on reflective practice has meant an increase in the popularity of the case study and action research methods. The case study is viewed as an appropriate method for classroom research because it is "...a research form which is particular about allowing subjects (usually practitioners) to speak for themselves." (Walsh 1993:41).

According to Yin (as quoted in Merriam 1988:10), "...the case study is a design particularly suited to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context." The case study method allowed me to conduct enquiry into the 'pond-life' of individual multigrade classrooms. Its advantage for me lay in its illumination of aspects of multigrade teaching which may inform my approach to multigrade teaching in South Africa. Thus, it may generate even a wider interest and application, derived from its "very particularity" Walsh (1993:56).

3. TECHNIQUES

The research techniques included a literature review, interviews and observations. This allowed for the triangulation of techniques and provided me with a rich mosaic of data for analysis.

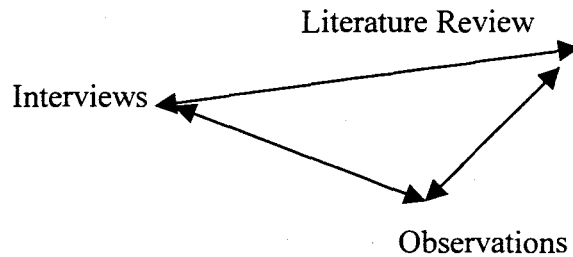


FIGURE 1 Triangulation of research techniques.

3.1 The Literature Review

As noted in chapter one, a review of the literature provided an overview of multigrade teaching around the world and in particular, Canada. The review contributed to an understanding of the issues surrounding multigrade teaching and the empirical evidence of the comparative effects of multigrade and single grade teaching on the cognitive and non-cognitive development of children. It also served as a backdrop against which the data and findings from the interviews and observations were juxtaposed for the purpose of interpretation.

A significant part of the review was conducted prior to the visits to the schools. This afforded me a better understanding of the cultural context of multigrade schools in Canada. The literature apprised me of the methods and techniques used by research authorities in multigrade teaching which also served as a backdrop against which to evaluate my own research efforts.

3.2 Interviews and Observations

Interviews and observations were considered appropriate methods for examining and collecting data on multigrade teaching in Canada. The interviews allowed me to "...elicit from the interviewee(s)...rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis" (Lofland and Lofland 1995:18), while the observations enabled me to watch the ongoing behaviour, activity and interaction in the classroom (Cohen and Manion 1989:128). These techniques allowed for me to be "impressed" upon by the events in these multigrade classrooms and to guide my thinking accordingly (Cohen and Manion 1989:134).

According to Cantrell (1993:96), "...Bogdan and Biklen (1982) consider field notes and observation as the mainstay of qualitative research, (while) Guba and Lincoln (1981) describe interviewing as the backbone." As a counterpoint to this debate, Lofland and Lofland (1995:19) emphasise "...the *mutuality* of (interviews and observations) as the central techniques of naturalistic investigation." When used together, they assist in the verification of the data. (see "Issues of validity" later in this chapter). Contradictions between what was observed and what was claimed by the teacher, were explored through dialogical processes (Baron and Sternberg 1986:130-143), namely, through redirecting points for discussion emerging from the observations to the respondent for comment and further discussion during and after the interviews. Furthermore, the observation sometimes provided new perspectives, which enabled me to introduce fresh points into the interviews.

3.2.1 Interviews

Interviewing was the main data gathering technique, while observations allowed for reflexivity in the technique (Cohen and Manion 1989:33). The semi-structured interview was preferred because it allowed me to plan the topics and issues to be

discussed while affording the necessary flexibility for a deeper exploration of information through open-ended questions, thereby "...enabling a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes." (Cohen and Manion 1989:313). Separate semi-structured schedules were designed for the different categories of respondents, namely, the teachers, principals, parents and researchers (see annexure A).

My schedules were, as Lofland and Lofland put it,

...not a tightly structured set of questions to be asked verbatim as written...Rather, (it was) ...a list of things to be sure to ask about when talking to the person(s) being interviewed...a checklist of sorts, a kind of inventory of things to talk about in the interview ...(and to) check ...off as they (were) accomplished.

(Lofland and Lofland 1995:85)

(For an illustration of how I used this technique, compare my interview schedules, annexure A, with the actual the transcripts, annexure B). The semi-structured schedule was useful since the logistical constraints did not afford an opportunity for further interviews. Careful attention was paid to the appropriateness of the language used in the schedule, especially for the parent schedules.

The interviews were conducted with teachers, principals, some parents of children in the selected classrooms, a Canadian researcher and Education Ministry officials. The teacher was considered an invaluable source of knowledge and experience regarding the various aspects of multigrade teaching in the classroom (McKernan 1996:52). Principals were interviewed to understand their attitude to multigrade teaching and, to determine what support or challenges the teacher encountered in the school. Parents were interviewed to examine how their attitudes, support and involvement in the classroom affected multigrade teaching. Interviews were conducted with a Canadian

researcher and Ministry officials for additional perspectives of multigrade teaching within British Columbia and for clarification of contextual or policy issues.

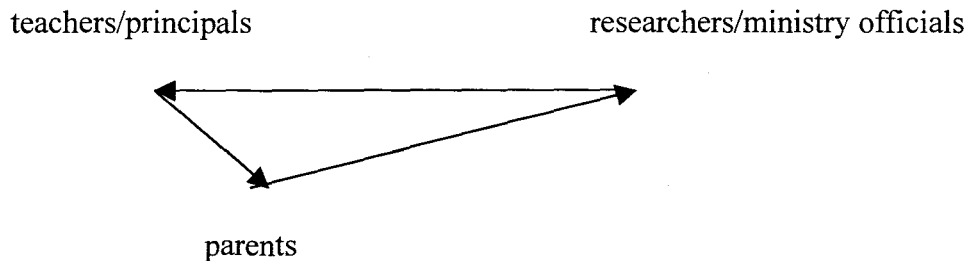


FIGURE 2 Triangulation of sources

The interviews were recorded in the form of field notes and audio tape recordings (annexure B). I found interviewing a worthwhile experience which, as Seidman puts it,

...has led me to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the amazing intricacies...of people's experiences...of the issues...the complexities and difficulties (of multigrade teaching)...Most important...interviewing (has led) me to respect the participants, to relish the understanding I gain from them, and to take pleasure in sharing their stories.

(Seidman 1991:103)

3.2.2 Observations

The observations were useful in obtaining primary source information and in the verification of the data obtained from the interviews. According to Powney and Watts (1987:94), in any interaction, 60% of the information received is non-verbal. Hence, what was captured through the interviews was only part of the data. The observations assisted in capturing some of this non-verbal data. These included, for example, the classroom layout, implementation of the curriculum, teaching approach, instructional strategies, relationships, grouping patterns, the interaction between the

children and between the teacher and the children and the extent of parent involvement. It allowed me to understand more than 'what' was transpiring. I could observe 'how' the curriculum was being implemented.

A schedule of the salient aspects of multigrade teaching under observation was designed. The use of the schedule resulted in me not being overwhelmed or distracted by data not pertinent to my research.

Non-participant observations made it possible to observe the classroom with minimal intrusion on the natural setting, either by altering behaviour within it or becoming too subjective, given the different social context being investigated (Cohen and Manion 1989:129). The triangulation of techniques and sources, helped to verify whether what was observed was a relevant reflection of the events in the classroom.

Banister *et al* support this research technique thus:

...(the) observation will produce rich and exciting results, which may help to challenge existing assumptions about social life, experience and rules, and to point the way to new developments...naturalistic observation is probably potentially the least reactive and the one that is most likely to produce valid results and insights that are very much rooted in 'real life'.

(Banister *et al* 1994:32)

The observations were recorded in the form of field notes (annexure D), supplemented by photographs. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995:89), "...writing is an absolutely necessary, although not sufficient, condition for comprehending the objects of observation...(it is) the fundamental concrete task of the observer..." They do, however, caution that note taking should not be too conspicuous. I resorted to jotting down key observations in shorthand form, in an inconspicuous manner and without losing my focus on the classroom.

4. PILOT STUDY

Although I was aware that the Canadian schools would present a different context, a pilot study was conducted at a multigrade classroom in a farm school in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The purpose of the pilot study was to explore my own understanding of the methodology and to test and make minor adjustments to the interview and observation schedules and the equipment, for example ensuring that the questions were phrased clearly and that open-ended questions were being asked. The adjustments ensured the congruency between my purpose, methodology and selected method and techniques. New domains for the examination of the data, such as the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade teaching, emerged as a result of the pilot study. This inherent value of pilot studies to alert one to potential problems and to allow for the modifications prior to embarking on the actual study is noted by some researchers (Powney and Watts 1987:125; Seidman 1991:29).

5. SELECTION OF CLASSROOMS AND RESPONDENTS

The Ministry of Education in British Columbia and the British Columbia Primary Teachers' Association assisted in the identification of schools according to selection criteria I had sent them. This assisted in ensuring the appropriateness of the schools selected. A written letter informed the respondents of the purpose of the research and sought their permission to record the sessions (annexure F). Their response was a positive one (annexure G).

5.1 Selection of the Classrooms

Initially, the intention was to keep the sample small by limiting it to two schools but later it was considered necessary to increase the number to four sites, to ensure that all the criteria were met.

5.1.1 Criteria for selection

The criteria for the selection of the classrooms included:

- a.) Primary schools with a combination of two or more grades or age groups.
- b.) At least one selected classroom should have a combination of three or more grades or ages. This was based on my assumption that the complexities in teaching a grade 1 to 4 or a Kindergarten(K) to grade 7 combination were different from that of a two grade combination.
- c.) Where possible, the selected classes should have an urban-rural spread. The literature had indicated that there was a widely held misconception that multigrade teaching was a rural phenomenon only. I wanted to determine whether this was the case. Furthermore, in both the developed and developing countries around the world, rural schools are reported to be marginalised. Mulcahy (1993:26) claimed that a similar situation existed in Canada. I was keen to determine whether this applied to the rural schools in my study.

5.1.2 Procedures

As noted, two additional schools were added to the sample of two schools. One of these was to ensure that the criterion for a classroom with a combination of more than two grades, was met. This consisted of the rural one-roomed school with an eight grade combination, i.e. kindergarten to grade 7. The other was to include a teacher who claimed that she disliked multigrade teaching intensely, which I considered a valuable perspective to add to my selection of schools.

5.2 Selection of the Respondents

A total of 21 respondents consisting of teachers, principals, parents, a researcher and Education Ministry officials were interviewed. The teachers were selected by virtue of being attached to the schools that were selected, except for one at School 3 who

was selected specifically because she expressed the view that she was opposed to multigrade teaching.

The principals were interviewed at two of the schools where the multigrade classes were observed, namely Schools 1 and 2. In the one-roomed school, School 4, the teacher assumed the role of principal as well. At School 3, only the teacher was interviewed. The classroom at this school was not observed nor was the principal or any of parents interviewed. This was because I was interested mainly in the teacher's negative attitude towards multigrade teaching and time did not allow me to observe the classroom or to interview anyone else at the school.

The teachers in Schools 1, 2 and 4 were requested to recruit two parents per classroom for the interviews. The criteria was to include parents who were positively and negatively disposed to multigrade teaching. We were able to find only one parent who had expressed negative attitudes towards multigrade teaching. The reason given was that most of the parents were happy with multigrade teaching.

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, the purpose of the research was explained to the respondents, their understanding thereof confirmed and their permission to record the interviews obtained. In addition, the respondents were assured of confidentiality. The transcripts were sent to the respondents for their comments. They were informed that their anonymity would be retained unless they indicated a preference to be identified. Since none of them, except Chapman indicated a preference to be identified, pseudonyms are used for them in this thesis.

TABLE 1 *Number of respondents and classrooms observed*

SCHOOL	TEACHERS	PRINCIPALS*	PARENTS/ COMMUNITY	OTHER	CLASSROOMS OBSERVED
				1 researcher 3 Ministry officials	
School 1	2 + 2 support teachers	1	1	-	1
School 2	1	1	5	-	2
School 3	1	0	0	-	0
School 4	1	*	2	-	1
Total	5 + 2	2	8	4	4

* In one roomed schools, the teacher usually served as the principal as well.

TABLE 2 *Grade combinations, age range and class size*

SCHOOL	GRADE COMBINATION	AGE RANGE	CLASS SIZE
School 1	Gr. K/1	5-7yrs	27
	Gr. 2/3	7-9 yrs	25
School 2	Gr. K/1	5-7 yrs	26
	Gr. 1 /2	6-8 yrs	23
School 3	Gr. 3 /4	7-9 yrs	24
School 4	Gr. K to 7	5-13 yrs	18

6. LOCATION OF SCHOOLS

For the sake of convenience, time and cost constraints, the selected schools were located in the school district of Kamloops, Province of British Columbia. Schools 1, 3 and 4 were rural schools while School 2 was situated in the City of Kamloops.

7. BIAS

Educational research is never value free (Connole 1998:20). An inescapable bias may be my own worldview of education which has been influenced by Western norms and values but embedded in my background experience of education of the disadvantaged in South Africa. It is hoped that the meetings with the researcher,

Professor Chapman and the Ministry officials, have helped to contextualise the research experience. Lastly, it is hoped that my year long sojourn as a pre-primary teacher in Canada, a decade ago, may have contributed to a better understanding and appreciation of Canadian education and way of life. As a researcher, I was conscious of my own 'discursive history' and the need to examine constantly my own subjectivity (Murray 1999:45). Throughout the research process, I attempted to be as unimposing as possible, seeking out the words of the respondents. This assisted my own reflexivity.

8. ASSUMPTIONS

As an educator, my own orientation has been embedded in a constructivist approach to education. This implies that the analytic framework which I have applied to the data is from the stance of constructivist, critical and reflexive thinking approaches to classroom teaching and learning. Developmentally appropriate practices, which are holistic and support the principles of child-centredness and experiential learning are the underlying assumptions in my approach.

The interpretivist paradigm resonates largely with a constructivist approach to education. Guba and Lincoln (1989:19,39,83) have referred to their methodology of naturalistic enquiry as 'constructivism'. For them, reality is a construction in the minds of individuals (Guba and Lincoln 1989:143). According to Schwandt (1994:125), "Constructivists share...the interpretivists' emphasis on the world of experience as it is lived, felt, undergone by social actors...knowledge and truth is the result of perspective." For constructivists like Bruner (as quoted in Schwandt 1994:125) knowledge is constructed: "...there is no unique 'real world' that preexists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language...".

Furthermore, this knowledge is being continually modified in the light of new experiences. For cognitive endeavours, this means that we do not pursue knowledge to arrive at the truth about something. Rather, we construct knowledge so that we may pursue further inquiry and invention. For example, for Piaget, knowledge is not a product but a process of adaptation and equilibration (von Glasersfeld, cited in Schwandt 1994:127).

My assumptions may have influenced me in various ways. One of these may have been my need to adopt a holistic approach to the problem and to seek to investigate several domains within multigrade teaching. I found that I could not simply study one domain, such as curriculum, since in a constructivist and holistic approach, one would need to study this in terms of other features, such as the context, methodology and parental involvement, to name a few. My approach is consistent with the method I have adopted: a case study "...seeks a holistic description and explanation." (Merriam 1988:10).

A further assumption was that some theory on multigrade teaching existed. While the bulk of this has been positivist, I extracted the information which served my purpose.

9. DELIMITATIONS

In the interpretation of the data, I examined the contiguity of multigrade teaching with cognitive and learning theories of Piaget, Bruner, Erikson, Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with these theories and therefore these theories will be used to illustrate the issues under discussion. The study will not attempt to evaluate the success of multigrade teaching generally or

attempt to claim that it is better than single grade teaching. The study is limited to an examination of the characteristic features of multigrade teaching in the selected classrooms, in order to arrive at a better understanding of this teaching phenomenon and its implications for South Africa.

10. LIMITATIONS

Two of the four classrooms were visited twice. Time and cost factors for an international study of this nature did not afford me the opportunity of a prolonged period of study at any of the selected classrooms. However, I do not believe that this limitation has affected the quality of my data in any way. Through careful planning during the early stages, every attempt was made to ensure that I asked the questions relevant for gathering the appropriate data. Furthermore, I had the option of following up with further questions, requests for information or clarification of issues through written correspondence.

A further limitation might have been the foreign context of the classrooms. It is hoped that my sensitivity to this issue and my own previous teaching experience in a Canadian classroom enhanced my understanding of the context.

11. ISSUES OF VALIDITY

A possible disadvantage of the case study method is that external validity is reduced and it cannot be assumed that the results are applicable to other situations (Cohen and Manion 1989:129). However, it may be argued that interpretivism does not presume to generalise. The underlying assumption is that this particular situation is being investigated in its own right.

On the other hand, some degree of generalization is possible in the very sense that it is not. The following interesting observation made by Smith (1995:9), may be true of multigrade classrooms in Canada, "...all schools are like no other schools, like some other schools, and like all other schools. In that sense, this study will have some parallels with other schools." He cites Spindler (1982) in support of this claim:

... an in-depth study gives accurate knowledge of one setting not markedly dissimilar from other relevant settings is likely to be generalizable in substantial degree to these other settings...

(Smith 1995:304)

The triangulation of techniques and sources lent further validity and credibility to this study by

...facilitating richer and potentially more valid interpretations. Exploration from a variety of sources using an appropriate combination of methods increases our confidence that it is not some peculiarity of source or method that has produced the findings.

(Banister *et al* 1994:145)

Schwandt acknowledges that the findings of interpretivist research may not be verifiable but posits a strong argument in support of other procedures which confirm rigour and validity. According to him,

The interpretation or decision one makes cannot properly be said to be verifiable or testable. Rather, at best, we can appraise the interpretation by applying norms or criteria that are compatible with the very condition that demands we interpret in the first place. Hence to judge an interpretation we might use criteria such as thoroughness, coherence, comprehensiveness, and so forth, and ask whether the interpretation is useful, worthy of adoption, and so on.

(Schwandt 1994:122)

By sending the transcripts to the respondents for comment may constitute what Guba and Lincoln (1985:213,219) refer to as 'credibility', a major trustworthiness criterion.

In more conventional terms, this means it helped to establish the 'internal validity' of my research.

Concerning internal validity, firstly, more than one classroom was observed. Secondly, the data from the interviews and observations could be triangulated. For example, in the interview, the teacher may have claimed that his/her approach was child-centred while the observation may reveal that it is authoritative and teacher-directed. Sometimes the observed phenomena were not clearly understood and had to be clarified in the interview later. For this reason it was decided to conduct the interviews after the observations, so that there was an opportunity to clarify or explore the observed phenomena more deeply.

Thirdly, the literature review was used for triangulation of the data obtained. Finally, and most importantly, this research is not an attempt to test a hypothesis. It is an exploration of how a particular approach to teaching - multigrade teaching - is handled within a particular context. In the interpretive paradigm, the theory is emergent from the data and not vice-versa as in the positivist approach (Cohen and Manion 1989:39; Walsh 1993:52). Thus, as a case study researcher, I could meet the "...practitioners on their own ground...and work together with them at making the operative theories of their practices explicit..." through my study (Walsh 1993:52).

Construct validity was achieved through the manner in which the questions were phrased to suit the context in Canada (annexure B) (Lather 1986:271; Guba & Lincoln 1989:60,238; Irwin 1999:13).

12. THE DATA

According to Lofland and Lofland (1995:67), the data consists of whatever is recorded either in write-ups, transcriptions, photographs and videos. For this reason, "...the recording task is considered a crucial aspect of the naturalistic analysis of

social life...the critical linchpin of our attempts.” (Lofland and Lofland 1995:67,69). On the other hand, Powney and Watts (1987:143) claim that the ‘database’ means the “...entire recorded and unrecorded data...” such as impressions gathered, ethos, posture, gestures and context. In this study, the data refers mainly to the recorded data. The transcripts from the interviews constituted the major part of this data, while the field notes from the observations and interviews and the photographs served as complementary data.

12.1 Data Collection and Analysis

The literature on research methods made me cognisant of the fact that these techniques could yield considerable unmanageable or irrelevant material. This was of special concern since I did not have the opportunity to revisit the schools at a later stage. Through thorough planning, and well-designed semi-structured interview schedules, this problem was averted. Qualitative techniques do not imply a lack of discipline and planning.

A short questionnaire (annexure E) was used to gather statistical information. Categories of information sought included the contact details of the respondents, their teaching qualifications and multigrade teaching experience, the number of children in their classes and the kinds of grade combinations in these classes. This questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the interview and served as a useful ice-breaker, which created a familiarity between the researcher and the respondents and allowed us to ease into the interview. It was only once this rapport had been established, that I requested their permission to record the interview. The actual signing of the consent forms was considered best placed at the end of the interview.

The data was collected and analysed according to the domains or categories defined *a priori* in the research design. The domains are: definition of terms, the status of multigrade teaching, prevalence, history, context, teacher preparation and experience, teacher support, classroom organisation and management, curriculum, materials, assessment, teaching approach and instructional strategies, attitudes to multigrade teaching, parent support and involvement, perceived cognitive and non-cognitive effects, the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade teaching and the respondents' opinion on what constitutes a successful multigrade classroom. These domains, except for one, were dictated largely by my own understanding of the areas in which I wanted to investigate multigrade teaching in the classroom. The domain on cognitive and non-cognitive effects was derived from Veenman's study (1995). It may appear that I have identified too many domains. However, by its very nature, qualitative research "...strives to understand how all the parts work together to form a whole." (Merriam 1988:16). Therefore, the case study in qualitative research "...concentrates on many, if not all, (*sic*) the variables present in a single unit." (Merriam 1988:7). These domains were encoded similarly for the collection and analyses processes. This procedure assisted in winnowing the irrelevant from the relevant data at the collection stage so that by the time of the analysis, there was little irrelevant data.

According to Powney and Watts (1987:158,160), analysis is not simply descriptive, it is "...*the detailed examination of the database...a creative, constructive affair...*" They point out that analysis should be consistent with the underlying philosophy of the research (Ibid.). Since my methodology was interpretivist and hermeneutical, I applied qualitative analysis to the data. Powney and Watts (1987:159) also point out that qualitative, descriptive analysis may be as rigorous as quantitative methods.

Through triangulation of the data and sources, careful coding and analysis, and allowing the voices of the respondents to 'come alive' in the interpretation, I was able to lend rigour to my approach.

The field notes from the interviews and observations were reviewed as soon as possible after the visit, to fill in the gaps and constitute full field notes. Research methodologists warn of the dangers of memory loss with the passage of time and advise that full notes be written almost immediately after the observation or interview (Powney and Watts 1987:125; Lofland and Lofland 1995:91).

In my analysis of the transcripts, I remained aware that meaning is indexical and relative (Cohen and Manion 1989:33). I paid attention not only to the words but to who spoke the words and to the context in which they were spoken, for example, whether they were teachers, principals, parents, researchers or government officials.

The data from the interviews were organised onto a grid so that patterns and trends across the different respondents could be examined. This was then triangulated with the data from the field notes taken during the interviews and the observations. The data were analysed according to the different categories of respondents. These categories were the teachers; parents; principals and the researcher and officials who were interviewed. Thereafter, the patterns and trends across the categories were analysed. The themes which emerged from the findings were interpreted and are presented later in this thesis, according to headings pertaining to the domains.

The triangulation of the data from the interviews and observations with the literature review allowed for the findings to be compared with the empirical evidence of international research authorities in multigrade/multiage teaching under each of these headings. The interpretation of these findings was done in the context of the

dominant international theoretical assumptions underpinning teaching and learning effectiveness. Finally, the implications of these findings were considered.

12.2 Presentation of the Findings

As far as possible, I have chosen to support the analyses by quoting the respondents liberally. This allowed me, as a researcher using qualitative methodology, to "...give primacy to the feelings, narrative and values of the subjects in the setting." (McKernan 1996:7). McKernan's emphasis is that "It is not enough to collect facts and feelings - the researcher must come to see these through the eyes, and from standing in the shoes, of the subjects." (Ibid.).

The findings of the study are presented in separate chapters, according to the domains. In the first instance, an interpretation of the analysis of primary data is presented and supported by the words of the respondents or my observations. Commonalities and differences are examined and triangulated with the findings of the literature review.

13. REFLECTIONS ON THE METHODOLOGY

In following an interpretivist approach, I internalised the underlying assumption of this approach, namely to understand the issues surrounding multigrade teaching in the context of Canadian schools. I avoided judgments which might be fraught with my own biases. I strove to maintain an open mind, to allow myself to be 'impressed upon by the events' and to allow the data to speak for themselves.

When I arrived at the point of interpreting the findings, I found myself paralysed for fear that my interpretation would be tantamount to a judgmental position on the research. This, I believed, would have been incongruent with my underlying

interpretivist philosophy. Furthermore, in rendering such 'judgment', to what extent would I be attempting to generalise what had all along been the particular? Within this paradigm, it was important to remain reflexive, but cognisant of the fact that one may become inert and not have an opinion on the findings.

At this point, I had to pause, reflect, do a 'me-search' (Wickam 1999:52) and further literature 're-search' to address the methodological dilemma in which I found myself. I could not turn to the multigrade researchers for direction because my main sources, Gajadharsingh (1991) and Veenman (1995) had employed quantitative methods.

Schwandt (1994:119) alludes to the possible roots of this dilemma and the paradox experienced by interpretivist researchers who celebrate subjective experience and then "...seek to disengage from that experience and objectify it." He points out that "The paradox of how to develop an objective interpretive science of subjective human experience thus arises." (Schwandt 1994:119). According to him, "This grappling with a synthesis of phenomenological subjectivity and scientific objectivity is evident in (the works of) Wilhelm Dilthey...Max Weber...and in Alfred Shutz..." (Ibid.).

One criticism leveled at the interpretivist approach is that it maintains the status quo, and produces a kind of social inertia. Some enquirers have opted for the critical approach so that they may bring about change through their research. According to Schwandt (1994:131), the critics of interpretivism "...hold that it is precisely because of this distancing of oneself as the enquirer that interpretivists cannot engage in an explicitly critical evaluation of the social reality they seek to portray."

Thus, it would seem that the dilemma I faced in concluding my research and arriving at some kind of 'judgment' of the data was not unique to me. It would appear that this challenge and dilemma is inherent in this research paradigm. It is one of the limitations of this methodology. As Schwandt (1994:130) puts it, "...interpretive accounts lack ...the ability to critique the very accounts they produce." However, I still believe that this was the most appropriate methodology available for my research purpose. It equipped me with an in-depth understanding of multigrade teaching and allows for further enquiry at a later stage: "Interpretive accounts are to be judged on pragmatic grounds of whether they are useful, fitting, generative of further enquiry, and so forth." (Ibid.).

A further dilemma experienced was the decision on which technique would be the mainstay of my research. As mentioned in section 3.2 on Interviews and Observations, some researchers claim that observations are the mainstay of qualitative research. For example, Taylor and Bogdan, claim that "...interview data represent a secondhand account of the world versus the firsthand experience of observing..." (as quoted in Merriam 1988:87). Some researchers warned that, what interviewees say and do may be contradictory.

The problem is that what interviewees say they believe, prefer, or do, may not correspond with 'actuality'. This is not to say there is necessary deliberate deception of an interviewer...Researchers have to make the assumption that people are knowledgeable and logical in their self-awareness.

(Powney and Watts 1987:190)

It is my considered opinion that for my research purpose, interviews were a more sound methodological device for exploring interpretive research. In the interviews, reflective practitioners could share their understandings of their multigrade teaching.

I was obliged as an interpretivist to 'take them at their word', to make meaning of

their understanding of their multigrade classrooms. On the other hand, observations are my interpretations or impressions of their behaviour and actions in the classroom. As a foreigner within their context, I believe that it was safer to accord more validity to the interviews, rather than my interpretations of the observable phenomena. Their own understanding of their context and hence the history, thoughts, feelings and intentions of their practice may not be understood through observations. Observations were important in triangulation. However, in the final analysis, it may be said that:

The research report is the interviewer's story of the interviewee's story...Eventually it depends on what the reader wants to believe, what the researcher wants to know, what the respondents do or would like to think they do. In the end, the best an interviewer can hope for is insight into the respondent's favourite self-image.

(Powney and Watts 1987:193)

CHAPTER THREE

STATUS AND CONTEXT

The status of the multigrade classroom is related to its context for, as McKernan (1996:7) states: "...one cannot understand human behaviour unless one understands the framework within which the actors construct their thoughts, beliefs and actions." In this chapter, the status and context of multigrade teaching in British Columbia, Canada is examined. The status of multigrade teaching is examined with reference to the use of terminology amongst the respondents, its history and prevalence in British Columbia. The context of multigrade teaching is examined with regard to urban/rural spread, the prevailing economic conditions, the kinds of grade combinations and class sizes and the nature and extent of teacher preparation, experience and support.

1. STATUS

It was found that a low status is accorded to multigrade/multiage teaching in British Columbia. This status is demonstrated by:

- a) the respondents' perceptions that officials do not pay much attention to multigrade/multiage teaching (their view is supported by the literature review);
- b) the lack of research in this area;
- c) the confusion and interchangeable use of the terms 'multigrade' and 'multiage' by the respondents and some researchers;
- d) the lack of a clearly defined classroom practice as will be shown in section 2.1; and,
- e) the apparent disjuncture between actual practice and the definition of the practice.

The latter three points will be covered in section 2.1.

a) Official status

A principal and some of the teachers claimed that the officials and politicians knew little about multigrade teaching, provided no form of support for multigrade teaching and were concerned mainly about administrative matters (Hines 1998:19; Lawson 1998:3; Larkin 1998:38; Oldman 1998:5). On the other hand, Ministry officials informed me that the issue of multigrade teaching was not a primary concern for them because, firstly, it was only one of several concerns confronting education and secondly, curriculum implementation and classroom organisation was the responsibility of districts and schools, not the provincial ministry (Ministry officials 1998:13, 18-21).

Canadian researcher, Mulcahy (1993 25-26), who refers to the multigrade approach as an “official secret”, shares his difficulties in finding “...references to this phenomenon...” His enquiry revealed that “...multigrade classrooms have received little or no attention...” (Ibid.).

b) Lack of research

As noted, the literature search revealed that there was little research on this topic. Respondent and researcher Chapman pointed out that “...in fact there is very little research on multiaging.” (Chapman 1998a:3). According to the literature reviewed, a study in northern British Columbia found that “...respondents were uncertain about whether hard research supports multiage classes...” (Gomulchuk and Piland 1995:31) while another Canadian researcher, Gajadharsingh (1991:10) warns that “...the lack of relevant research information resulted in the development of (negative) ‘intuitive feelings/attitudes’ toward the multigrade classroom.”

It appears that not only is there little research into multigrade teaching but that teachers are not familiar with the current research efforts on multigrade teaching. Thus, a possible reason for the inferior status accorded to multigrade teaching may be attributed to the lack of research on multigrade teaching as cited above. The following views by McKernan may illustrate possible reasons for this lack of research:

Curriculum research, and much educational research, still remains a specialist activity engaged in by professionally trained social scientists who operate outside the curriculum and the classroom...

(McKernan 1996:15)

and

...(the) separation of theory and practice ...(has) insulated professional researchers from the teaching ranks. This separation has had a negative consequence of preventing researchers from studying problems in the field, particularly innovative practices.

(McKernan 1996:11)

It would appear that teachers need to become more involved in multigrade research and that researchers need to engage teachers in participatory classroom research. In the literature review, Gomolchuk and Piland (1995:28) raise a serious concern about the consequence of educators not being familiar with the theory and research: "Unfortunately, many educators continue to make significant decisions about the configurations of elementary classes without the benefit of data or research to back up their arguments for or against multi-age classes..."

Discussion

Multigrade teaching has been relegated to an inferior status in society and is not formally recognised in Canada and most other countries. American multigrade researcher, Miller (1991:7), puts it aptly thus: "...multigrade...classrooms are viewed as temporary remedies to be endured for a year (or so) until things return to 'normal'." (Ibid.). Canadian researcher Mulcahy (1993:26) attributes "...this lack of attention... (to) the false belief that these classrooms are an isolated anomaly." Yet, in

Canada, one out of seven classrooms is multigrade (Gajadharsingh 1991:1). Principal Hines (1998:4) believed that all schools in Kamloops have at least one multigrade classroom.

If the status of multigrade schools is to change at all, it may have to begin at the level of those who are directly affected by multigrade teaching, viz. the practitioners, who through their own professional associations could raise an awareness of the issues which multigrade teachers face in the classroom. A distinctive policy needs to be developed to support and improve multigrade teaching practice.

1.1 Use of Terms

As noted, it was found that the respondents and even some experts on multigrade/multiage teaching used the terms and concepts interchangeably, even though they mean different things. I have chosen to explore this confusion of terms in this thesis because it may be indicative of the status accorded to multigrade teaching in British Columbia.

The respondents, when asked to define the terms 'multigrade' and 'multiage', appeared not to have given much thought to definitions or to what their particular practice may be defined as. One teacher defined multigrade as more than two grades, i.e. K/1/2 (Taft 1998:1). She also used the terms 'split grade' and 'family groupings' interchangeably and stated that there was "not really" any difference in the terms: "I do not really think they are doing things differently depending on the term, I think it depends on the teacher." (Ibid.). However, according to some multigrade authorities, these terms are distinct and they mean different things (Lodish, as quoted in Fogarty 1993:36; Regional Laboratory study 1994:1-2; Veenman 1995:319; Chapman

1995:416). Furthermore, the teacher implies here not only that terminology need not be consistent with practice, but that it is the practice and not the terminology that is the most important determinant of the kind of teaching approach. Her understanding is not contrary to my finding that what many respondents referred to as 'multigrade teaching' could, according to their classroom practice of not separating the grades for teaching, be defined as 'multiage teaching'.

It would appear that multigrade classes (as opposed to multiage classes), are established in response to administrative needs, such as low enrolment. However, the teaching approach adopted by the teachers in these classrooms may not be defined as 'multigrade' because they do not maintain grade specific curricula for the different grades within the classroom. Instead, they integrate the grades and the curriculum for teaching, i.e. they adopt a pedagogical approach which approximates multiage teaching more closely. It seems that ministry officials are aware of this approach. Ministry officials said that the classrooms are established probably on a pragmatic decision based on enrolment and the assignment of staff, but pointed out that a combined class.

...really works better if integrated learning experiences can be offered and if those outcomes can be combined in an authentic way. What does not work so effectively...is to have an artificial barrier where you have the (grade) 3's here and the (grade) 4's there ...being offered two different curricula, two different resources, reading different books, doing different activities.

(Ministry officials 1998:7)

Thus, it appears to be commonly accepted that while the combined classroom may start out as a 'multigrade classroom' (i.e. established for administrative rather than philosophical reasons), the teachers are likely to convert them into multiage classrooms through their teaching approach.

Teacher Oldman who identified her practice as 'multiage', defined the term as follows:

...(multiage) from my point of view is a classroom of...children who are of a variety of ages and a variety of abilities...I am charged with the job of teaching those children, taking them from where they are now...to a certain point further on.

(Oldman 1998:1)

Her explanation indicates that she attaches a pedagogical basis to her understanding, which is consistent with Veenman's definition of multiage used in this study (see chapter 1).

According to principal Forester(1998:1), the use of the term "...depends on the context of the school." At a previous school at which he worked, the term 'multiage' was used and the parents were "...prepared... with the knowledge that it was good to have a variety of ages working (together) in the classroom." (Ibid.). At his present school, it was called "...multigrade because this school has always had multigrade classrooms." (Forester 1998:1). He revealed some ambivalence in his use of terms when he elaborated that because there are usually "two grades per class" at his school, it is actually "...a split grade, not a multigrade..." When pressed to define multigrade more specifically, he claimed that it "...means children of at least two grades in one classroom." (Forester 1998:2). In essence, it appears that although he intimates that there is a difference between the terms 'split grade' and 'multigrade', he did not ascribe necessarily different meanings to them.

Principal Hines (1998:2) admitted that they had not discussed any terminology at the school: "We have not discussed it with the staff ...multi-age and split. Those would be our two terms. Multigrade is not one we use around here." She defined multigrade as children being

...within the same class but they are still separate, whereas multiage... is a more fluid organisation. It allows children to move up and down through there depending on what their needs are... multigrade still allows you to have grade specific curricula taught in all the areas.

(Hines 1998:2-3)

This definition corresponds with Veenman's definition as used in this study. Canadian researcher and respondent in this study, Professor Chapman, offers a similar definition: "...multigrade implies...a multiple of grades in your classroom, you might still treat them as though they are split classes... Multiage... is a more open conception, more like family grouping...blurring those grade levels..." (Chapman 1998a:1). For her it is not "...an organisational or structural thing...(b)ut...a philosophical one or a conceptualisation of how we think about learning and teaching." (Ibid.). According to her, the term 'split' is closer conceptually to multigrade whereas family grouping is closer to multiage (Chapman 1998a:2). Katz *et al* explain the concept of family grouping,

Family units typically include heterogeneity in age. The family group provides its younger members with opportunity to observe, emulate, and imitate...Older members have the opportunity to offer leadership and tutoring and to assume responsibility for less mature and less knowledgeable members.

(Katz *et al* 1990:2)

One Ministry official (Ministry officials 1998:5), claimed that the term 'multiage' is preferred in British Columbia while Canadian researcher, Gajadharsingh (1991:9) claimed that multigrade was the more widely used term in Canada.

A useful counterpoint to these definitions is the actual teaching practice in these classrooms. In School 2, the teaching practice resembled multiage teaching and corresponded with the definition tendered by both the principal and teacher of that school namely, that the grades were integrated for teaching and that the teacher focussed on individual needs rather than a separate prescribed curriculum for the

different grades. However, although the respondents at the other three schools identified their teaching approach as multigrade teaching, the actual teaching practice was inconsistent with the earlier definition of Chapman and Veenman. In Schools 1, 3 and 4 there was some degree of integration of the instruction across the grades. The grades were not treated as 'totally separate' groups within one classroom. Neither were they multiage since there was no attempt to 'totally blur' the ages as was apparent in School 2. It seems that they called it multigrade specifically because there had been administrative imperatives, such as enrolment and budgetary constraints, for combining grades. However, the teaching approach appeared to resemble multiage teaching, for example, the integration of the grades and curriculum for instruction and the peer tutoring strategies.

This lack of use of a distinctive terminology among the respondents was echoed in the literature review and is an indicator of the low recognition and status accorded to multigrade teaching. Gajadharsingh, who conducted a comprehensive study of multigrade teaching across Canada for the Canadian Education Association (CEA), avoids differentiating between the two terms and in fact implies that they are used interchangeably:

The CEA study uses 'multi-grade'... because the term is widely used in the Canadian educational system... The most closely related terms are multi-age, multigrade, and family groupings.

(Gajadharsingh 1991:9)

This view is echoed by Little (1995:1): "...in North America, where age and grade are more congruent, the terms 'multiage' and 'multigrade' are often used synonymously" and, an Appalachia Education Laboratory study (1990:5): "the concept of the multigrade class - also known as ... multiage..." At the other extreme, Way's (1981:179) definition of multiage contradicts the one used in my study, which

is based on the following experts, Lodish (in Fogarty 1993:36), Regional Laboratory study (1994:1-2), Chapman (1995:416), Gomolchuk and Piland (1995:29) and Veenman (1995:319). Way claims that "Multiage grouping is not contingent on any particular theory or practice but describes only classroom organisation or structure." Thus, there appears to be little consensus on the definition and uses of the terms 'multigrade' and 'multiage' teaching amongst the experts.

Discussion

My analysis reveals, firstly, that the respondents had not given much consideration to terminology. Secondly, the different respondents attached different meanings to the terms, multigrade and multiage. This is not surprising since these definitions are not used in a clear and consistent way even in the literature on multigrade and multiage teaching.

Thirdly, the respondents did not appear to have given much thought, either philosophically or conceptually, to determining whether the practice evident in their classrooms resembled either multigrade or multiage teaching. One possible reason for this may be linked directly to the low status of multigrade teaching in Canada.

Another reason may be that flexibility is a fundamental principle of their teaching approach and may explain their application of a teaching practice that is neither multigrade nor multiage, but rather a combination of the two. The study found that although some classrooms were called 'multigrade', there was a pedagogical and philosophical basis, usually associated with multiage teaching, underpinning their teaching practice, such as integrated teaching across the grades and the utilisation of

flexible grouping strategies. In essence, their actual practice was a mixture of the multigrade and multiage approach.

According to the CEA report, the difference between the two terms, multigrade and multiage is a function of the reason for combining the classes to begin with i.e. administrative or pedagogical and not because of the actual kind of teaching which is practiced in the class (Gajadharsingh 1991:6,7). It appears, however, that this study of multigrade teaching in Canada did not attempt to define the respondents' understanding and use of the terms. Nor did it pay much attention to whether the grades were being taught separately according to grade specific curricula or whether there was some degree of fluidity between the grades and the use of instructional strategies, such as integration and peer tutoring.

A reason for this may be attributed to the quantitative nature of Gajadharsingh's study. The main data gathering technique was questionnaires, administered by mail. This did not afford Gajadharsingh an opportunity to explore a deeper understanding of the respondents' own interpretation of the terms, and whether any ambiguity was evident. In my case study, the semi-structured interview allowed for this data to emerge. Furthermore, a comparison between the respondents' words and their actions was not possible in Gajadharsingh's study because classroom observations were not conducted. In my view, qualitative methods may be more suitable for gathering this kind of data.

1.2 History

As noted in chapter one, multigrade schools have a long history in Canada. It was found that Schools 1 and 4 had been multigrade since their inception in 1918 and 1898, respectively. Two of the parents who were interviewed had attended multigrade classes as children (Bellini 1998:2; Penny 1998:11).

The literature reviewed supports the view that multigrade classes have a long history in Canada (Gajadharsingh 1991:6; Mulcahy 1993:25; Veenman 1995:366). Multigrade schools in Canada and the United States began with the one-roomed school (Gajadharsingh 1991:10) and they have survived Mann.⁴

1.3 Prevalence

Despite the low profile of multigrade schools as mentioned in the previous sections, it was found that multigrade classrooms were a common phenomenon of the education system in British Columbia, Canada. Hines commented that in Kamloops “most schools would have at least one multiage class” (Hines 1998:4). Chapman (1998a:7) alluded to the large number of both multigrade and multiage schools in the big city of Vancouver, while a government official (Ministry officials 1998:7) stated that it was a “fairly prevalent practice”. This observation that multigrade schools are fairly prevalent in British Columbia, may apply to other parts of Canada as well. Gajadharsingh (1991:33) found that “...one out of every seven Canadian classrooms is a multi-grade classroom.”

Two respondents proffered both administrative and pedagogical imperatives for the high incidence of multigrade classes. According to Hines (1998:4), the number of multigrade schools increased when teacher contracts began specifying class sizes about ten years ago. Due to the collective agreement on pupil: teacher ratios, schools were forced to combine classes in order to honour these contracts.

⁴ Horace Mann's visit to Prussia was known to have hailed the institutionalisation of single grade schools in North America (Pratt in Fogarty 1993:45) (see chapter one).

Chapman (1998:6) cited the non-graded *Primary Program*⁵ (outcomes-based curriculum), which was introduced in 1990, as a contributing factor. These reasons are borne out by similar findings in Gajadharsingh's study (1991:36). Although he found that administrative reasons outweighed the pedagogical reasons, he points out that for British Columbia it may have been different: "Respondents from British Columbia noted the government's mandate for un-grading the primary division (as a reason for combining grades)..." (Gajadharsingh 1991:37).

Discussion

A useful counterpoint to the reasons given above for the prevalence of multigrade teaching, is a survey of multigrade schools conducted by John Malcolmson for the British Columbia Teachers' Federation as far back as 1986, prior to the resurgence of multigrade schools in response to the *Primary Program* or teacher contracts. This survey revealed that 28% of elementary classrooms in British Columbia were multigrade (Craig and McLellan 1987:6). This may suggest that multigrade classes were on the upsurge anyway, in spite of the *Primary Program* or the teacher contracts. On the other hand, it may be argued that the *Primary Program* was a response to the teachers' call for more "developmentally appropriate practices"⁶, which were a feature of education in North America in the 1980s. In other words, the social imperatives for curricular changes were already there and the *Primary Program* was a result of this. This interpretation is supported by the following

⁵ The Primary Program, an outcomes based curriculum for the primary division, was developed in response to the Sullivan Royal Commission, which called for a more learner-centred approach in education in British Columbia (Hines 1998:7). A non-graded approach is suggested in the program, through both its guiding principles and its position statements, respectively: "The curriculum is free of rigid structures such as ...grade levels..." and "A non-graded organisation implies that learning begins where the child is and moves forward as the child is able." (*Primary Program Foundation Document* 1990:20,24).

⁶ 'Developmentally appropriate practices' is the label given to curriculum and instructional strategies that are individualised and child centred by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, D.C. (Bacharach et al 1995:3)

excerpt from the *Primary Program* support documents: “Our schools are changing because our society is changing and our understanding of how people learn is changing.” (Supporting Learning 1992:I).

As mentioned in chapter one, the limitations of the graded system were recognised by Montessori, Pestalozzi and Dewey and, as early as the 1930s, systems that are more flexible were introduced. According to Katz *et al* (1990:viii), Goodlad and Anderson’s publication in 1959 aroused interest in the potential benefits of mixed age grouping. In the 1970s, educators experimented with the open classroom concept (Lodish 1992:20; Veenman 1995:320).

In essence, it appears that there have been both administrative and philosophical imperatives for the increase in multigrade schools over the years. Irrespective of which one dominates, multigrade classrooms certainly are not an ‘isolated anomaly’, nor are they a temporary feature.

It would appear that not only are multigrade schools common in British Columbia but they have a long history too, having been in existence since at least the turn of the century, long before the advent of either the *Primary Program* or teacher contracts. Multigrade teaching certainly is not a temporary feature of the education system. It deserves greater recognition so that it may be supported as a system in its own right. This recognition needs to happen at three levels:

- 1.) Professional teacher associations ought to raise an awareness of multigrade teaching by promoting discussions amongst their members on related issues.

[Their membership probably includes a significant proportion of multigrade teachers since one out of every seven classrooms is multigrade.]

- 2.) Education authorities need to be persuaded to pay more attention to multigrade classes in terms of policy, support and other resources.
- 3.) Universities should include multigrade teaching in their teacher education courses and initiate and support research on multigrade teaching.

2. CONTEXT

2.1 Urban - Rural Spread

Multigrade schools were found in both urban and rural contexts. Of the four schools visited, one (School 2) was an urban school while the other three (Schools 1, 3 and 4) were rural schools. The literature review found that not only are multigrade schools prevalent in urban and rural areas in Canada but that there is a higher incidence of multigrade classrooms in urban areas than in rural areas :

The study data show that multigrade classrooms do exist in large numbers in urban and combined districts and can no longer be dismissed as only a rural phenomenon... Some 60% of combined grades are in urban districts, 23.8% in combined districts and 15.3% in rural districts.

(Gajadharsingh 1991:32,34)

Discussion

It may be concluded that multigrade schools may not be dismissed as a rural phenomenon only. Whatever the imperatives for the multigrade class are, more attention needs to be paid to raising the status of these schools.

2.2 Facilities and Resources

The evidence suggests that multigrade classes are more likely to exist in small rather than large school districts. According to Gajadharsingh (1991:34), "...school districts with...fewer classrooms regardless of locale, will have a higher frequency of multigrade classrooms." Some 94.4% of rural multigrade schools were in small districts while 69.4% of urban multigrade schools were in small districts (Gajadharsingh 1991:35, table 6).

Since the size of a school determines the funding allocation it receives from the Ministry, it would appear that rural multigrade schools are more likely to receive fewer resources than multigrade schools in the cities. One rural school (School 4), which had an enrolment of 18 students ranging from kindergarten to grade 7, had only one full-time teacher for all eight grades. Unlike the other schools, there was no support staff at this school, except for a part-time aide (Lawson 1998:24). In addition to teaching and attending to the management and administration of the school, the teacher had to diagnose children with special educational needs and provide any support needed by the students, such as remedial support. The teacher complained that they had no access to facilities (e.g. a gym) and the various kinds of equipment that one finds at larger schools (Lawson 1998:10). Gajadharsingh found that,

...the larger school districts with greater access to human, financial and space resources may have more flexibility in determining pupil-teacher ratios, assignment of duties and the use of available space within the school.

(Gajadharsingh 1991:34)

Mulcahy (1993:24) expresses concern that, "For some time now rural educators have been asking for recognition, acknowledgment, and assistance. Up to now their plight and pleas have been largely ignored." This trend, where rural multigrade schools are

marginalised, is reported to be a worldwide phenomenon (UNESCO 1981;1995a;1995b). In reviewing the UNESCO studies, Miller observed:

...the concerns and depictions of problems in these developing countries echo many of the concerns voiced in the United States and Canada by multigrade classroom teachers and rural educators.

(Miller 1991:3)

However, budgetary constraints seem to have effected urban Canadian schools as well. Hines pointed out that "Money is a real problem ...they put out these wonderful new curricula, and then they do not provide us any money for resources..." (Hines 1998:7). Gajadharsingh (1991:37) also noted the financial constraints facing Canadian education. A teacher at Hines' school, which is located in an affluent suburb, shared how she had purchased materials and equipment for her classroom over the years out of her own personal funds. She asserted that aside from the tables and chairs, "...almost everything else you see in this room I have purchased...in Canada teachers do subsidise the education system." (Oldman 1998:23). While the principal of one school believed that the funding was adequate, his parents still raised funds so that additional resources could be acquired (Forester 1998:15).

Discussion

The availability or non-availability of resources is dependent on the context. Since rural multigrade schools are likely to be smaller than urban multigrade schools, they are likely to receive a lower allocation of resources. However, from my South African perspective, the Canadian schools were well-resourced relatively, including the inadequately resourced, one-roomed school. The classrooms were spacious and had ample equipment, materials and books. In some classes, a video machine was available, while others had access to computers.

2.3 Class Size and Grade Combinations

Class size is limited by specifications contained in the teachers' contracts. (annexure K). The specified size of a class is 25 allowing for a maximum of 2 additional children. If there are children with special needs in the classroom, the number is decreased on a one to one basis. For kindergarten, the specified size is 20. All the classrooms under study seemed to be operating within this specification. Gajadharsingh's Canadian study (1991:38) found that most teachers had an enrolment of between 21 and 25 children.

Due to the size specification, multigrade teachers in Canada do not encounter the problem of teaching in overcrowded classrooms. Yet, one of the teachers interviewed believed that there should be fewer students in a multigrade classroom. She specified that there should be 20 children in a two-grade combination and 18 to 20 children in a three-grade combination (Larkin 1998:5,6). Gajadharsingh (1991:43) confirms that the majority of teachers in his survey preferred multigrade classes with lower numbers of between 15 to 20 children. On the other hand, another teacher was of a different opinion, "I do not actually believe the class size affects good teaching." (Oldman 1998:25). She claimed that she could teach 30 to 32 children (Ibid.).

While class size was fixed according to the teacher contracts, various kinds of grade combinations were to be found in the classrooms under study (refer table 2, chapter two). The grade combinations at the schools visited were found to range from two or three grade combinations to an eight-grade combination at the one-roomed school (School 4). Grade combinations were based usually on enrolment and it fluctuated from year to year (Forester 1998:1,4, 25).

Discussion

Given the financial constraints facing education in British Columbia (Gajadharsingh 1991:37; Hines 1998:7;) and the apparent lack of the interest in multigrade issues shown by the authorities (Hines 1998:19; Larkin 1998:38-39; Oldman 1998:5,13,50), it is hardly likely that the size specifications for multigrade classes will be reduced in the near future. However, authorities have indicated that the class size for primary classes i.e. grades 1 to 3, will be reduced to 22, by the year 2000. This is in keeping with a memorandum of agreement between the British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the Government:

Where there is more than one primary grade in any class...the class size maximum for the lower grade shall apply...Where there is a combined primary/intermediate class, an average of (a) the maximum class size of the lowest primary grade and (b) the maximum class size of the lowest involved intermediate grade will apply.

(Memorandum:K-3 Primary Class Size, 17 April 1998)

There are indications that the Ministry intends further reductions until a goal of 18 is reached (Ministry officials 1998:9). Thus, it seems that multigrade teachers in the primary classes need not worry about large class sizes. However, it will be interesting to see how this policy is interpreted and implemented in one-roomed schools.

2.4 Teacher Preparation and Experience

Teachers in Canada receive virtually no teacher education that prepares them specifically for multigrade teaching. It is only through trial and error, after years of experience, that these teachers learn to cope with multigrade teaching.

2.4.1 Teacher preparation

Although the teachers interviewed had the equivalent of a five-year education degree, none had received any specific coursework on multigrade teaching. One teacher attributed this to

The assumption...(at) the universities in the city that everybody is going to end up in some nice school where there was one grade in every classroom...and you just follow the separate curriculum.

(Lawson 1998:1)

This opinion is verified by Gajadharsingh's study:

The majority of teachers currently teaching in multi-grade classes (84.1% of them) had received no training for these classes...Although there have been multi-grade classrooms for a long time, teacher education institutions have chosen to ignore them. Many faculties of education in the past opted not to place their student teachers in such settings. Perhaps the current reality that their graduates are actually teaching multi-grade classes may prompt these institutions to make sure this kind of experience becomes a required part of the training for all prospective teachers.

(Gajadharsingh1991:41)

In his review of the UNESCO studies of multigrade teaching in developing countries in Asia, Miller found that,

Similar to preservice training in the United States, all countries participating in the conference reported that (teachers) were not prepared for teaching multigrade classrooms.

(Miller 1991:3)

As a useful counterpoint to this position, one teacher found that the education she received at university, whilst not geared specifically towards multigrade teaching, offered approaches and strategies that might be adapted successfully for multigrade teaching (Oldman 1998:2-3). She cited these approaches as open-ended and encouraging creativity, lateral and free thinking, multiple intelligences and kinesthetic learning. Hines observed that since the advent of the *Primary Program* about ten years ago, the Universities have offered coursework that, though not geared specifically towards multigrade teaching, included "...teaching strategies that would apply in a multiage situation." (Hines 1998:10). This approach, however, may not be good enough since the student teachers may or may not receive relevant instruction.

The inclusion of instruction pertinent to teaching in multigrade classrooms is not a feature of teacher education in Canada.

2.4.2 Teacher experience

Despite having received no teacher education on multigrade teaching, the teachers, through their self-reports and my observations, were found to be managing this form of teaching fairly well. This was made evident by the following observations:

- a) The learners were actively engaged and participating in the learning process.
- b) The teachers were busy but not confused.
- c) They worked according to their planned programme.
- d) The teachers employed a variety of strategies.
- e) The learners appeared happy and interested in the programme.

The teachers' apparent success in managing the class effectively may be attributed to the experience they had gained over the years. One teacher indicated that a practicum in a multigrade classroom, K/1/2 at a lead school for the implementation of the ungraded *Primary Program*, had influenced largely the way she now teaches :

...what made it (easy) for me was being in that classroom for my practicum...I saw it in operation, I saw it first-hand. I went to my classroom and I did exactly what she did and it worked.

(Stone 1998:5)

For another teacher, the experience of five years of teaching in a kindergarten class, with its attendant open-ended approaches, had helped to prepare her for multigrade teaching.

Discussion

In the final analysis, teachers receive little or no preparation for teaching in multigrade classrooms. Even at the school level, the days set aside for professional development are not allocated specifically for discussions on multigrade issues

(Hines 1998:11). This however, does not mean that teachers do not want or need such training. According to Stone (1998:5), she simply accepted it: "...I have not really thought about it...like every other teacher, very often you stumble through and you learn by experience." She claimed that "It would have actually been nice..." to receive some education on multigrade teaching (Ibid.).

The teachers' apparent success in multigrade teaching may be due to two things. Firstly, it may be due to the experience they have gained over the years. Secondly, while the course work did not cover multigrade teaching *per se*, it did emphasise child-centred, participatory, activity-based, flexible, open-ended, multiple intelligence approaches and the use of a variety of instructional strategies. These approaches and strategies enables the teacher to adapt her knowledge and skills for application in the multigrade classroom.

A parent, who was inspired to follow a teaching career after having experienced multigrade teaching for two of her three children, makes the following recommendations for teacher education. She maintained that courses should include: discourse on the concerns and issues of multigrade teaching, the dynamics of a multigrade classroom, discipline in a multigrade classroom, multigrade teaching strategies and the integration of materials (Dean 1998:9).

In his study, Gajadharsingh (1991:41) found that "Several respondents wanted professional development days where they could talk to experienced teachers and observe their classes.". All the schools in my study were allocated professional development days, but in practice, these days were not used to discuss multigrade teaching (Hines 1998:11).

Instead, the teachers were forced to learn by trial and error. After several years of teaching, constantly in search of new ideas, they discover what works and what does not. Each teacher had a shelf of books and reference materials and indicated that they were constantly in search of new ways of doing things. McKernan emphasises the important role that teachers have to play in the improvement of their teaching practice. He posits that classroom practitioners,

...should adopt a research stance towards their work, suggesting rigorous reflection on practice... The key idea is that each classroom or work space becomes a laboratory for testing, empirically, hypotheses and proposals that are planned and implemented in the curriculum.

(McKernan 1996:4)

2.5 Teacher Support

It was found that not only do teachers receive little or no preparation for teaching in multigrade classrooms, but that the education system does not offer any form of support specifically for teachers with multigrade classrooms (Hines 1998:11). Lawson (1998:3) confirmed this when, in response to the question: 'Was there any support being provided ... by the district (office)?', she responded adamantly: "Not at all."

By contrast, it is interesting to note that in other areas of teaching, a highly sophisticated support system is available to teachers in British Columbia. According to Forester "...there is a very large level of support throughout the school district." (Forester 1998:9). For example, at his school, there is a learning assistance teacher and an assistant learning assistance teacher to provide remediation and enrichment; a First Nations support worker who works mainly with First Nations children, helping them academically to manage the transition from home/reserve to school and from one cultural context to another; a full-time librarian and an itinerant librarian assistant

who visits the school one day a week and a speech and language pathologist who visits the school once a week. In addition to this, at the district level, there is a psychometrician, a psychologist and visual and hearing impairment specialists. Then there are full-time paraprofessional support workers for children with severe special needs. Part-time teachers come in during 'prep.' time to afford the class teacher an opportunity to engage in other duties, for example, planning.

Discussion

There appears to be a well-resourced support system available to teachers in areas other than multigrade teaching. Considering how prevalent multigrade teaching is in British Columbia and given the ungraded *Primary Program*, an Education Ministry programme, the lack of any kind of support specifically for multigrade teachers seems to be a glaring omission on the part of the authorities. In the literature review, a northern British Columbia study found that teachers:

...want and need help. It is imperative that school and district leaders support their teachers of multi-age classes with professional development opportunities, sound research-based practice, and additional resources for helping all students to learn in this unique environment.

(Gomolchuk and Piland 1995:32)

The question is how will this happen? When will it change? It seems to me that it may change only if teachers make their needs known to the Education Ministry. This may be difficult because the teachers in my study appeared to have accepted the current low status of multigrade teaching. They appear to give little consideration to the lack of attention multigrade teaching receives from the education authorities, in terms of their planning and budgetary allocations and the absence of relevant teacher education and support for multigrade teaching. When asked whether her teacher education had prepared her to teach multigrade classes, one teacher stated that she had "...not really thought about it..." Stone (1998:5). Principal Hines (1998:11)

explained that "...it has never been raised as an issue. I think it is something that people accept..."

Before the issue of multigrade teaching is likely to receive more attention than it currently does in British Columbia, the teachers themselves may have to recognise that multigrade teaching is a permanent and significant feature of the education system deserving of more attention and support.

CHAPTER FOUR

CLASSROOM ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This chapter examines the teachers' organisation and management of the multigrade classrooms, with specific reference to planning, the environment, materials and discipline in the multigrade classroom.

1. PLANNING

As mentioned earlier, the teachers under study were found to be coping fairly well with multigrade teaching. The reason may be the considerable time they devoted to planning, organising, assessment, reflection and re-planning. Some parents proffered that a successful multigrade classroom depended on how organised the teacher was (Canon 1998:9; Wren 1998:7). A teacher echoed this view; "I like to be organised." (Stone 1998: 7).

It was found that all the teachers spent considerable time on planning, assessment, reflection and re-planning. Larkin (1998:29-30) stated that she spent 4 hours over the weekend planning for the week. She usually planned her assessment at the same time. She spent an additional 40 minutes a month planning the monthly seating arrangement for the children.

Oldman (1998:20-21) planned for the year during the summer vacation and then devoted an additional 2.5 hours for planning new themes when required, usually over a weekend. She compiled her weekly plan during 'prep.' time. Taft (1998:15) undertook an overall plan at the beginning of the year, which she constantly revised according to the children's needs. She usually planned on a daily basis, after school. According to Stone (1998:21) and Forester (1998:18,19), all members of staff sit

down to plan for the year during Professional Development Day to avoid repetition or omissions in the curriculum programme, from class to class and from year to year.

There are three aspects to the teachers' planning. Firstly, it focusses on the needs of the children, taking the children from where they are to a point further on (Oldman 1998:1). This endeavour to base the programme on the child's needs is in keeping with current theories on how children learn (Montessori 1968; Forester and Reinhard 1989; Katz *et al* 1990; Myers 1991; Politano and Davies 1994; Bacharach *et al* 1995; Chapman 1995) and with the principles of the British Columbia curriculum and the South African national curriculum (*Primary Program Foundation Document*, 1990; *Curriculum 2005*, 1997).

Secondly, the teachers demonstrated that they were fully conversant with the curriculum and that they based their planning and practice on it (annexure H) (Larkin 1998:5; Oldman 1998:16-17). According to Oldman: "...we use everything...When I sit down to plan my next theme...I will have out my list of benchmarks, I will have the IRPs..." (Oldman 1998:17). The same may be said for Lawson: "...I put the learning outcomes ...together for K-7...When I am doing my planning I can look at it..." (Lawson 1998:15).

Thirdly, the teachers invited the children to provide input on their planning so that the plans mirrored the children's interests; "...I know (the) learning outcomes ...but ...those learning outcomes can be taught within a lot of different...subject areas ...So the kids have input in directing ..., (I)ike, what do you want to talk about?" (Lawson 1998:17).

Discussion

The essential ingredients for managing the multigrade classroom effectively appeared to be:

- a) the amount of time the teachers dedicated to careful planning and organising of the classroom programme,
- b) the attention paid to the needs and input of the children and,
- c) basing their planning on the curriculum outcomes.

Planning and organisation are important especially in a multigrade classroom where the teacher has to ensure that she is catering for the diversity of children in her classroom. Focussing the planning on the needs of the children is essential because the children, of diverse ages and grades, will have differing needs. Consulting them in the design of the programme appeared to be a useful procedure to ensure that the programme would be appropriate and relevant. It appears that the child-centred curriculum guides the teacher in this process and is conducive therefore to the combining of grades or ages in the classroom (Refer also to Forester's (1998:27) comments in chapter ten that multigrade teaching almost forces the teacher to pay more attention to their planning).

In the literature review, Miller made a similar finding: "...the multigrade teacher must be well organised and put in lots of preparation time..." (Miller 1991:7), while McKernan points out that "...practitioners must engage in curriculum inquiry to improve their art and practice." (McKernan 1996:5).

2. ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Physical Space and Equipment

Space did not appear to be a problem in the Canadian classrooms observed in this study. There was ample space for the accommodation of the children, the display of materials and for learning centres around the periphery of the classrooms. In some instances, shelves with equipment and materials were arranged to create a corner or learning centre, for example, a book corner. The classrooms were well-equipped, attractive and colourful. This created the appropriate atmosphere and environment for happy and interested children.

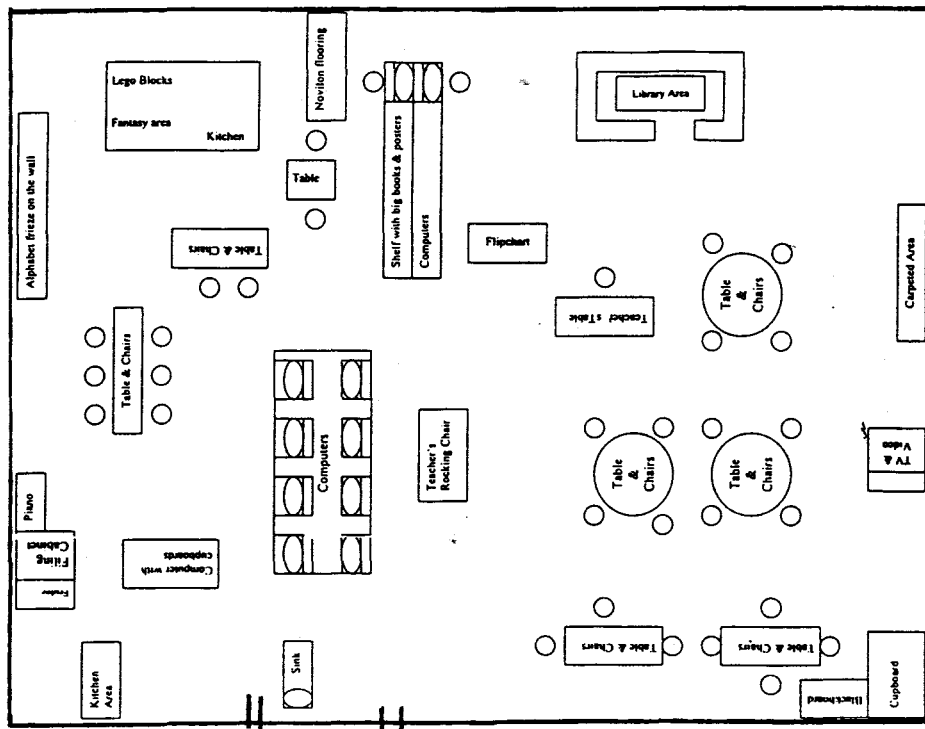


Figure 3 K to 7 Classroom layout

2.2. Seating and Grouping Arrangements

The layout of the classrooms was conducive to the seating and grouping arrangement required to manage the multigrade classrooms efficiently. Each class had a designated carpeted area where the children could be seated for whole class instruction. There were no rows of desks, only tables and chairs arranged for groups of 4 to 6 children to work either individually or together. Fixed desks restrict the movement and interaction of children. Tables and chairs are more conducive to flexible group arrangements.

In Oldman's class the children had a choice of working on the floor or at the tables. In Stone's class, the children worked in pairs during reading time, discussing and sharing their work.



Photo 1: Buddy reading

The teachers never sat at their own tables (stations), nor were they in one place for a long time, except during the whole group instruction. Thereafter, they would move through the class and instruct small groups or individuals, on a one to one basis (Larkin 1998:18; Stone 1998:39).

Larkin (1998:16) found cooperative grouping to be an effective technique for organising and managing her multigrade classroom. She changed the groups, which were of mixed grades, on a monthly basis to ensure that by the end of the year, children had worked with both friend and foe (Ibid.).

2.3 Materials

In all the classrooms, the children had free access to a range of materials, including those that fostered activity-based learning, such as manipulatives, counters and magnifying glasses. The range of materials provided stimulation for the differing levels of the children in the multigrade classes. It also allowed for the easier integration of children with special needs, giving them access to materials suited to their needs. This prevents them from feeling ostracised (Lawson 1998:9).

Discussion

The layout of the classrooms was consistent with the curriculum philosophy and teaching approach evident in these classrooms. The classroom organisation created a warm, pleasant and comfortable environment. The children were free to move around the classroom allowing for interactive learning and various grouping strategies to form. The teacher's mobility enhanced her interaction with small groups and individuals thereby avoiding a teacher directed approach. These arrangements are in keeping with current theories on how children learn best (Bronfenbrenner, Bruner, Erikson, Piaget, Vygotsky).



Photo 2: Concrete materials to teach math

3. DISCIPLINE

The atmosphere of freedom and flexibility observed in classrooms did not necessarily lead to a lack of discipline or control on the teacher's part. On the contrary, the teacher and the children shared responsibility for discipline which resulted in a profound sense of structure amidst the relaxed atmosphere.

3.1 Role Modelling

This disciplined atmosphere may be attributed to the multigrade approach itself, since it created an environment for the older children to set an example for the younger children. According to Hines (1998:23), the younger children model the behaviour of the older children. Stone (1998:46) corroborated this view claiming that there are 15 role models in her class (i.e. 15 grade 3 children in the grade 2/3 class). She deliberately mixed the groups to ensure smoother discipline: "I also like to have

(grade) 2's and 3's at every table ...somebody responsible at every table.” (Ibid.). Lawson (1998:30) shared an example of the older children curtailing a younger child with behaviour problems.

Discipline could pose a problem for a teacher who has to manage young children, attending formal school for the first time. Usually, they have not been accustomed to the social order within a school. However, according to a grade K/1 teacher, this need not be the case in a multigrade classroom:

...the group of kindergartens... have not been to a pre-school or anything like that, most of them. So they are... a little bit harder to discipline than the older kids. ...(A)t the beginning of the year, I kept saying to the grade 1's...you are the example, you show them how to behave... So that has helped quite a bit at the beginning. It is not hard ...by using them as examples... the older children are good role models so it worked out really well that way.

(Taft 1998:13)



Photo 3: Role modelling : Grade 2 and 3 boys work at same table as grade 7 boys on left.

3.2 Learner Participation in Setting Classroom Rules

Another reason for the well-maintained discipline in these classrooms may be that the learners participate in both the establishment and maintenance of the classroom rules. This approach leads to self-discipline rather than teacher enforced discipline. Lawson claimed that,

At the beginning of the year, general rules for the school...were developed with community members, parents, children and the staff together..., (sitting) in a circle.”

(Lawson 1998:21-22)

According to Larkin (1998:27), the children helped to set rules at the beginning of the year (Larkin 1998:27). Through the basic rule: “...treat others the way you want to be treated...”, her children are taught that there are consequences to their actions and that they have to take responsibility for their actions (Larkin 1998:13).

3.3 Clearly Defined Teacher Expectations

The teachers constantly informed the children of the programme, reminding them of their expectations and confirming that the children had understood these. Lawson (1998:12) claimed that this helped her to manage the classroom better. Before the lunch-break, Stone reminded the class what the afternoon programme would entail (annexure D-1). Later, in the interview, she explained her reasons for this:

...it is nice for them to know. I discovered that they like knowing...the more information you give them about that sort of thing the more they work together with you...

(Stone 1998:7)

Larkin (1998:27,28) stated that during the first month of school she focussed on classroom routines, management and setting up the cooperative learning groups. In her view, this was time well spent to ensure that the expectations and agreed to rules and routines were clear.

3.4 Classroom Monitors

Some teachers had monitors whose responsibility was not to maintain discipline but to hand out and collect work (so that all the children were not running all over the classroom) and to prepare for art (Stone 1998:9-10; Larkin 1998:16,27,28). This responsibility rotated amongst the children on a daily basis. In addition to the classroom monitors, there were helpers at each table in Stone's (1998:9-10) class.

Discussion

From the way in which these teachers managed their classes, it would appear that discipline need not be a problem in a multigrade classroom, where there are children of different grades and ages in one class. On the contrary, discipline becomes easier to maintain because:

- a) the older children become effective role models;
- b) the children participate in setting the rules;
- c) the teachers define their expectations clearly; and,
- d) classroom monitors or helpers assume responsibility for certain tasks.

According to Chapman (1998a:11), having children of different ages in the classroom had a positive effect on discipline. She claimed:

There were fewer problems ...because the older children, I could always appeal to them to be helpful and mature and responsible...I had them when they were younger...So they knew my standard. They knew my expectations and they knew my routines... So by the end of the first week at school even though half of the children were new, everything just ran.

(Chapman 1998a:11)

These findings appear to be substantiated by in literature review by Miller, who identified one of the six key variables affecting successful multigrade teaching as:

Classroom management and discipline: developing and implementing classroom schedules and routines that promote clear, predictable instructional patterns, especially those that enhance student responsibility for their own learning...

(Miller 1991:8)

CHAPTER FIVE

CURRICULUM ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This chapter will examine:

- how the curriculum used by the teachers in British Columbia is conducive to adopting a multigrade approach;
- how the principles of the curriculum, such as a child-centred and needs based approach, integration, relevance and inclusion, cater for multigrade teaching; and,
- the assessment and reporting methods used by these teachers.

1. THE CURRICULUM AND MULTIGRADE TEACHING

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the school curriculum for British Columbia, the *Primary Program*, is outcomes-based and focuses on "...meeting the needs of all learners..." (Supporting Learning 1992:1). In its guiding principles, this curriculum makes unequivocal suggestions for a non-graded approach:

The curriculum is free of rigid structures such as fixed ability-groupings, grade levels (K,1,2,3) [emphasis mine], retention, and promotion that impede continuous learning...

(*Primary Program* 1990: 20).

One of its position statements, under the heading 'Non-graded Organisation' states:

The *Primary Program* is designed to accommodate a diversity of learning rates and styles which occur naturally among children. The departure from the traditional organization of the primary curriculum into grade levels...removes the expectation that there is a pre-determined body of content which must be learned or mastered by students in a specific block of time...

(*Primary Program* 1990:24)

It appears that the *Primary Program* encouraged multigrade and multiage groupings.

Chapman pointed out that

...there was an upsurge and increase in multiaging after the *Primary Program* first came out...It really validated a lot of the things that were happening at grassroots.

(Chapman 1998a:6)

Hines (1998:17) concurred that the *Primary Program* “definitely” made it easier to teach multigrade classrooms.

Changes in the government after 1990, however, led to certain changes in the *Primary Program*, one of which was a move back towards grading the curriculum (Chapman 1998a:6; 1998b:2; Hines 1998:7; Ministry officials 1998:5; Taft 1998:5).

Whereas previously, the assessment was based on performance indicators specified for the end of the primary phase, they now had benchmarks for each grade (Taft 1998:5-6).

Nevertheless, in the interests of child-centredness, the outcomes for K/1 and 2/3 in the *Primary Program* were clustered (Chapman 1998b:2). This made the combination of those grades relatively easy (Hines 1998:17). However, this did not seem to have had any significant effect on the way the grades were combined in schools. It was based mainly on the number of children enrolled. For example, Larkin taught a grade 3/4 class and Oldman, a grade 1/2 class.

Notwithstanding these changes, there appears to have been a resistance from the primary teachers against this trend towards a graded curriculum (Chapman 1998a:5; Oldman 1998:14-15,47). According to Chapman,

... there has been a response from primary teachers that those separate individual curricula do not match the way that young children learn and the way it is appropriate to teach them.

(Chapman 1998a:5)

She stated that the IRPs [Integrated Resource Packages - curriculum support materials] were developed by subject specialists who did not liaise with one another. Hence, the IRPs tended to grade the curriculum, which was not the original intention of the curriculum (*Primary Program* 1990:15-43).

Some teachers continue to teach a nongraded curriculum. Oldman (1998:14) proudly pointed out that "...within our primary wing here and probably within the primary wing of most Kamloops schools you will see wonderful (non-graded) *Primary Program* work going on." She emphasised that she always has and always will teach according to the basic tenets espoused in the *Primary Program*: "I always plan through the *Primary Program* before we even had one and I will continue to do so." (Oldman 1998:17) However, she sometimes did things the conventional way:

I do not believe in standardised testing unless it has to happen. From time to time, I do sit the children down ...especially the older ones (and) I will say, 'today I want to know if you can spell these words.' ...I have not thrown the baby out with the bath water, but I also will not terrify them with unnecessary testing.

(Oldman 1998:47)

Stone (1998:5), after seven years of experience, found that she draws from what she likes best in the *Primary Program* and from "the old fashioned way" for example, rote learning the 115 "most often used words in the English language". Thus, there is flexibility in the way the old and new approaches are combined for effective classroom teaching.

Recent revisions to the *Primary Program*, to be published in 1999, may make multigrade teaching easier (Chapman 1998b:2). According to Ministry officials who were interviewed, the main reason for these revisions has been the issue of and need to define continuous progress, of which multigrade or multiage teaching has been only "a spin-off" of this process (Ministry officials 1998:1).

Discussion

The curriculum appears to be conducive to multigrade teaching because it focuses on the needs of the children as a starting point. It is likely that its suggestions for non-graded organisation led to the upsurge in multigrade classroom organisation in the early 1990s. Despite the impact of the graded support materials (IRPs), the latest revisions (clustering the outcomes for some grades) have made it possible to continue various forms of non-graded organisation. It appears that some teachers (Oldman) continue to teach from the premise of the original philosophy and intent that "...rigid structures such as ...grade levels...impede continuous progress." (*Primary Program* 1990:20).

Gajadharsingh's contention (1991:41) that the graded curriculum caused problems because of "...the enormous amount of time spent on trying to modify the regular curriculum..." may not apply to primary classrooms in British Columbia because the *Primary Program* makes it possible to combine grades for teaching.

Perhaps most importantly for curriculum organisation in the multigrade classroom is not what curriculum is used but how the curriculum is used. In order to use the curriculum effectively, the teacher must be fully conversant with it. Larkin (1998:5) stressed that the teacher must know the curriculum "...inside out, upside down..." Oldman concurred: "You have to understand the learning outcomes. You have to be a professional. You have to know your curriculum...I am hired to know my curriculum." (Oldman 1998:16). She instilled this responsibility in her student teachers: "I usually say to them, 'you need to know the curriculum, that is why you are called a professional...that is your responsibility'." (Ibid:19). The teachers in this study demonstrated a good knowledge of the curriculum:

- a) they were familiar with the specific outcomes,
- b) they designed their programmes to assist the children in attaining the benchmarks and,
- c) their teaching strategy included the integration of the curriculum across both the grades and the learning areas.

In a previous section, I alluded to the amount of time devoted to planning and that the teachers constantly researched new ways to improve their practice. McKernan highlights the importance of this practice when he refers to Stenhouse's thesis,

...that all teaching ought to be based on research and that research and curriculum development are the preserve of teachers; the curriculum then becomes a means of studying the problems and effects of implementing any defined line of teaching. The practitioner gains understanding of his or her work and thus teaching is improved.

(McKernan 1996:11)

2. CHILD-CENTRED AND NEEDS-BASED APPROACH

As mentioned earlier, the teachers constantly take into account the children's needs, building on the children's prior knowledge as they interact with the curriculum and plan their programmes. Teachers enquire from the children 'what they know' and 'what they wonder about'. This is based on the learning web, 'Know-Wonder'⁷ which helps teachers to determine the children's prior knowledge and their interests for programme planning (Larkin 1998:22; Oldman 1998:18). This practice helps to ensure that the implementation of the curriculum is child-centred, based on the needs of the children. In addition, Taft found that the *Primary Program* allowed the children to learn at their own pace (Taft 1998:5).

⁷ The Know- Wonder web is discussed further in chapter 6, section 1.2.1. For additional information, the reader may refer to Brownlie, F., Close, S. & Wingren, L. (1988). *Reaching for higher thought: Reading writing thinking strategies*. Edmonton: Arnold Publishing.

Discussion

In the multigrade classroom, where there are children with a range of different ages, levels and grades, a child-centred approach which caters for the needs of the individual children, may be more conducive to effective classroom management and teaching.

The overall focus of the philosophical guidelines of the *Primary Program* is to "...provide children with learning experiences that recognize, respect and honor their uniqueness as learners." (*Primary Program* 1990:16). The first guiding principle of the curriculum states:

Children are unique individuals. They develop and learn at different rates, in different ways.

The learning environment helps develop individual potential. It respects and values differences in children, building upon individual differences rather than stressing conformity. It provides opportunities for continuous learning without such structures as grade levels and fixed ability grouping or procedures of retention and promotion. It allows for the fact that learning occurs in different areas at different times, in different ways. Children are assessed and evaluated, in terms of their achievements, not by comparison to group norms. It encourages children to improve their performance and realize their potential rather than compete with others.

(*Primary Program* 1990:16)

This approach may be applied in a multigrade classroom with relative ease since it caters for the diversity of needs within that environment. It encourages teachers to recognize that learning occurs in different ways at different rates for different children and that the group norms, usually followed in a single grade classroom, may not encourage children to reach their individual potential as readily.

In the literature review, Lodish (as quoted in Chapman 1995:416) contends that "...multiage classes are becoming more popular in both the United States and Canada as we move toward more child-centred and developmental approaches to education."

He recognises that multigrade teaching is conducive to the application of curricula based on these approaches.

3. INTEGRATION

The term integration may have several meanings in an educational context (*Curriculum Framework for ECD* 1997:5; *Primary Program* 1990:25). For the purpose of this study, it means the combining of the grades and/or the learning areas (subjects) in the curriculum for integrated teaching and learning experiences. The integration of the grades may also be regarded as an instructional strategy but I prefer to deal with it in this section because it is linked to how the curriculum is managed in the multigrade classroom.

An interesting feature of curriculum management and organisation, found in the classrooms, was the method used to integrate the curriculum for instruction and the degree of integration. This integration occurred, albeit in varying degrees, both across the grades and across the curriculum. In other words, there were instances of the integration of the grades during instruction, and of the different learning areas for instruction.

3.1 Integration of the Grades

The data revealed that all the teachers in the study integrated the different grades in their classroom for instruction (Lawson 1998:16; Larkin 1998:9; Oldman 1998:27; Stone 1998:12; Taft 1998:13).

Teacher Stone (1998:12) found it “much easier” to teach her grade 2 and grade 3 class together. She had learned this approach from the teacher who had supervised her practicum: “I still remember from when I went through... my practicum, grade 1/2, she always did everything together.” (Ibid.).

3.1.1 Different expectations for different children

The teachers were asked how they ensured that the programme was challenging enough for some children and yet, remained at a comfortable level for others in the classroom. Stone stated that in novel study, for example, the children were all reading the same novel but her expectations were different for the different grades. "I expect more (from the grade 3's)." (Stone 1998:13).

Taft also explained that when she taught both grades simultaneously, she had different expectations of them: "You can do the same thing just expect different things." (Taft 1998:17). For example, when doing a theme on dinosaurs, the kindergartners will draw dinosaurs and grade 1's will write about them. If they are doing maths, the kindergartners will demonstrate counting using the maths manipulatives (e.g. counters) whereas the grade 1's will do bonds, for example subtraction (Ibid.). Another strategy that she used and which was feasible only when a kindergarten grade was part of the grade combination, was to teach subtraction during the time that the kindergarten group was not present. Usually, the hours of attendance for the kindergarten are less than that for the other grades.

Stone (1998:11) allowed her grade 2's to be exposed to everything during whole group instruction but she assigned different written work for them to do independently at the tables. She says "Usually what I do is I teach grade 3 lessons to everybody so that the grade 2's are hearing it, but they do not have to do the work." (Ibid.). The principal confirmed that the teachers at his school do not segregate the grades (Forester 1998:25).

For Oldman (1998:29) art was the easiest subject to teach to an integrated class, although she believed that many teachers did not feel this way: "...my colleagues often comment that it is one of the hardest...". For her, math was the most difficult subject to teach to an integrated class but she openly admitted that the reason may have been because it was her difficult subject. She also views "...math as more closely fitting the old grade or age, developmentally..." (Ibid.). She found that language was easier to teach to an integrated classroom.

3.2 Integration across the Curriculum

Theme teaching (often referred to as 'units' by the Canadian teachers) was not only an instructional strategy but also an integral feature of curriculum management. The theme or unit was seen as a vehicle for integrating the curriculum across the learning areas (Larkin 1998:20; Oldman 1998:16). For example, Oldman chose the theme *Pocahontas* when the Disney movie was released because the children were very interested in it and she felt she could use it to 'hook' their interest (Oldman 1998:16). Through this theme, she was able to integrate several areas across the curriculum (Ibid.), for example:

- social responsibility - responsibility for the environment;
- social studies - the history of the hero and the journey from England to Canada;
- language arts - composing their own written accounts about *Pocahontas*; and
- music and art - learning the songs and drawing their impressions of aspects of the film.

This approach reveals the sound pedagogical principles that are employed by the teachers, such as: (a) the teacher's awareness of the children's interests and needs and, (b) allowing the children to make connections between their home lives and school and between the curriculum and real life.

Larkin (1998:20-21) believed that the curriculum was geared more for integrating the curricula for grades 2/3 than for grades 3/4, which she found particularly difficult. This may be because the curriculum approach and content are different for the primary and intermediate phases. This concern about the integration of grades across the primary and intermediate divisions was echoed by Forester (1998: 25-26) and one of the parents who contended that it "...may sometimes create problems." (Penny1998:2). On the other hand, Lawson integrated all eight grades, K-7, for part of her instruction and she has managed this successfully for eight years. She was observed reading the *The Arabian Nights* to the whole class. She pointed out that the theme is often the same for all grades but that they approach it from different levels with varying degrees of intensity - "...we are talking about the same kinds of things even though each level may be talking about it in a different background" (Lawson 1998:15). Under the theme 'Families', for example, she explained that the younger children will be talking about their own family or community while the older children may focus on families in other cultural contexts for example, First Nations⁸ communities or ancient civilisations (Ibid.).

Discussion

It seems that at least for part of their instruction, the teachers find it easier to integrate across the grades than to teach the separate grade groups. It was found that the theme approach was used commonly as a vehicle for integrating the learning areas. In fact, it was an effective mechanism for integrating the teaching for the older and younger children while the teacher ensured that they were all working at their own levels.

⁸ See glossary for the definition of First Nations.

In the literature review on the other hand, Gajadharsingh's study (1991:43,42) found that what teachers identified as one of the "top instructional problems" was also ranked a "most effective strategy" namely, the integration of the curriculum for large group instruction. The reason for this may be that while teachers in his study recognise that the integration of the curriculum for large group instruction is an effective way to teach in a multigrade classroom, many may not have the skills or expertise to integrate the curriculum effectively.

Furthermore, it may be that the respondents in my study did not experience this problem as acutely because as noted, the British Columbia curriculum, the *Primary Program*, made it easier to integrate the curriculum and the grades (Chapman1998:6; Hines 1998:17; Oldman 1998:14,17,47; Taft1998:5; Stone 1998:12). Relevant teacher education and support in this area may be useful in helping some teachers overcome this problem.

4. RELEVANCE

It is important for the curriculum to be relevant to the children in terms of their needs and their context. According to Bruner, the context in which teaching and learning occurs is essential for effective teaching and learning to take place because:

...(it enables) the student to generalize from what he has learned to what he will encounter later. ...The best way to create interest in a subject is to render it worth knowing, which means to make knowledge gained usable in one's thinking beyond the situation in which the learning has occurred. ...An unconnected set of facts has a pitifully short half-life in memory.

(Bruner, as quoted in Stenhouse 1975: 15-16)

According to Oldman (1998:16), her main aim is to have happy and interested students. This may happen only if the programme is designed to be relevant to the interests of the children. For instance, Stone (1998:26) used rap to teach math.

The curriculum also has to be relevant culturally to children. If not, it interferes with their capacity to derive optimal learning benefits. For this reason, because there is a significant proportion of First Nations children at School 1, a First Nations support worker was employed to support the First Nations children academically and also to assist them in making the cultural transition from their home and community into the school environment (Stampier 1998:1). Despite not having this kind of support available, the teacher in the small School 4 endeavoured to make her programme relevant by using local stories rather than 'canned' (i.e. published) ones (Lawson 25,33). The teachers also used relevant themes to make the curriculum culturally appropriate for all the children. Lawson had completed a theme on the local First Nations Band and Stone used the theme, 'Arctic', to discuss the lifestyle of the Inuit [a First Nations people in Canada]. The First Nations support teacher and Stone were co-ordinating a cultural festival between their school and the Skeetcheson First Nations school nearby, to commemorate First Nations Day. They explained that this approach was important not only to affirm the First Nations children but for the other Canadian children to experience the First Nations culture too. Forester (1998:23) explained the importance of celebrating diversity through unity by "...keep(ing) our children aligned to the diversity and to the fact that we all live in one country, a beautiful country, a large country, but we have to be a 'one' within it."

Discussion

The relevance of the curriculum is an important factor for effective teaching under any circumstances. Given the diversity in the multigrade classroom it would seem that greater attention ought be paid to the relevance of the curriculum in multigrade teaching.

5. INCLUSION

Inclusion means that all children are catered for in the curriculum, irrespective of ability, race, culture or gender. There is evidence throughout this study that the teachers ensured that their programme catered for the diversity of students with regard to ability, race, culture and gender. This evidence is integrated in the body of the thesis.

The curriculum policy is explicit about the inclusion of all children:

As the Program is designed to be child-centred, it responds to the diversity of individual learners by helping children understand, respect and appreciate individual differences. ...By creating environments in which everyone's ability and unique contribution is recognized and celebrated, we honour the heritage, gender culture and abilities of all members... In the *Primary Program*, teachers model, demonstrate, accept and respect all children regardless of physical, racial, religious, cultural, or socio-economic backgrounds.

(Primary Program 1990:33)

The teachers appeared to have internalised this policy because they demonstrated sensitivity and respect towards all the children.

It was found that children with special needs were integrated in the multigrade classrooms (Larkin 1998:16,39; Lawson 1998:30; Oldman 1998:35-36; Stone 1998:13,17; Taft 1998:12). Lawson claimed that she had children with foetal alcohol syndrome and attention deficit disorder. In Larkin's class (1998:16), there was a visually impaired child who was allowed to sit at the front of the classroom. There was a hearing impaired girl in Oldman's (1998:37) class. Stone (1998:13,15,17) had a learning disabled and a gifted child in her class, while Taft (1998:12) had a developmentally delayed child. They all found that the multigrade environment

helped in the integration of these children. Oldman used sign language in the classroom and she conducted a sign language club, which was attended by children of all ages, with and without speech and hearing impairments (Oldman 1998:37; annexure D-2). Some parents attended these sessions too. Thus, all children were developing skills to communicate with children with speech and hearing impairments. Through my observation of a session of the club, I found that there was considerable caring and warmth between the children with and those without impairments.

As noted, special attention was accorded to the inclusion of children of all cultural groups through themes which focussed on First Nations, Japanese, Indian and Italian cultures (Lawson 1998:25; Stone 1998:11; annexures D-1, D-4).

All the classrooms visited were co-educational and although my study did not particularly include an examination of gender bias, I did not gain the impression that girls were being treated differently from boys. They all shared in privileges, tasks and responsibilities. An example of this was that in Stone's (1998:10) class the VIP for the day was a girl.

6. ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

Assessment and reporting are an integral part of the teaching and learning process and will be examined in this section with a view to understanding how they support multigrade teaching.

6.1 Assessment Methods

The *Primary Program* (1990:21-31,93-119), which upholds the principles of a child-centred approach to education with developmentally appropriate practices, appears to discourage assessment methods such as standardised and formalised tests. These

methods of testing have been replaced with continuous assessment in the form of authentic evidence of the learners' performance through observations, portfolio collections and peer and self-evaluations (Lawson 1998:28-29; Oldman 1998:42; Stone 1998:28-29; Taft 1998:8).

Most teachers in the study professed that they do not believe in standardised testing (Larkin 1998:31-32; Oldman 1998:42; Stone 1998:28; Taft 1998:8). One teacher stated that she was uncomfortable with testing the children on a theme that they had completed because learning is not about the knowledge content, but rather, "It is a process around that topic." [emphasis mine] (Stone 1998:28). Some teachers conduct spelling tests for practice and not for assessment purposes (Larkin 1998:32; Oldman 1998:47; Taft 1998:8). Stone and Taft used the "mad minute", a quick maths test which the children enjoyed and found exciting: "I just do it every day and they love it. Did you see how quiet they were? They love it." (Stone 1998:25). Some teachers give the children spelling tests on the most commonly used words (Larkin 1998:32; Stone 1998: 26).

Stone related that the parents wanted these tests even though she had explained to them that it is the spelling **in** the children's writing that counts. Nevertheless, there appeared to be no harm in giving these tests since "The kids like the spelling tests and the parents like them, so it keeps them happy." (Stone 1998:26). Oldman (1998:42-43) claimed that standardised tests were conducted only to detect developmental problems. Larkin (1998:34) used standardised reading tests at the beginning of the year only as a diagnostic measure to help her determine a programme for individual children. Thus, the teachers test the children to give them extra practice or to

determine their needs and not for the purpose of grading them. They do not use standardised testing as a norm and the test marks are not recorded.

In these schools, assessment, like teaching and learning, involves the triumvirate of the teacher, the child and the parent. Assessment for the purposes of understanding the needs, interests and developmental progress of the children and for the purpose of reporting to the children and their parents takes place on an ongoing basis.

According to Forester(1998:20), "...the assessment is all based on widely held expectations for the children...". One teacher explained that previously, the benchmarks for the child's development were more 'open', but now they were specified for each grade (Taft 1998:6). In the *Primary Program* (1990), the descriptors for the learner's development were ungraded initially, merely indicating 'early primary' or 'later primary'. However, following certain changes to the curriculum [as noted in section 1 of this chapter], the outcomes are now specified for each grade, except for the primary level where they are clustered for grades K/1 and 2/3 (Chapman 1998b:2; Ministry officials 1998:5; Taft 1998:6). In fact, these benchmarks define where the child should be, developmentally, at the beginning of the year, at mid- year and at the end of the year (annexure I).

Some teachers claimed that they planned for assessment when they plan their programmes (Larkin 1998:29; Oldman 1998:42). Oldman (1998:46) has designed an assessment form that details all the areas covered in a theme (annexure J). She records the children's performance as they progress through these units of learning, in this way.

A teacher acknowledged that assessment applies not only to the children but the teacher's practice as well (Oldman 1998:42). For her, the children's behaviour served as an indicator: if one child was misbehaving, that may be a function of either her practice or the child has a problem. If all the children are misbehaving, it indicates that she has to change something in her practice (Ibid.).

Discussion

The eschewing of standardised testing, within the policy (*Primary Program* 1990:29) and by the teachers in this study, is consistent with recent trends in curriculum development. Bacharach *et al* (1995:26) found that the traditional "competitive-comparative pupil evaluation systems" which utilize "standardized and/or formalized tests assume that there is only one right answer." In this type of assessment, the focus is on the product and not on the learning process and it tests conformity instead of "celebrating the diversity inherent in classrooms" (Ibid.). Further, standardized testing is only a "...rough indicator of student progress, it does little to guide teachers in creating developmentally appropriate curricula." (Ibid.). Bacharach *et al* caution that "For assessment to be optimally valuable to teachers and students, it must be embedded in the curriculum." (Ibid.). According to Forester and Reinhard (1989:211), "the ongoing assessment and close observations of children's progress that are integral to teaching the learner's way are ideally suited to working with children of differing ages."

6.1.1 Observations

The teachers conduct observations of the children on a daily basis (Larkin 1998:32-33; Lawson 1998:27; Oldman 1998:46; Stone 1998:33; Taft 1998:8-9). According to the *Primary Program* (1990:95,102,106), assessment and evaluation are based on multiple observations in a number of contexts. The teacher observes the processes

and the products of the children's learning. The process includes the way they interact with their world and the people therein, while the products are the things that they do, make or create (*Primary Program* 1990:106). Lawson (1998:27) observed and recorded both the academic and social development of the children while Taft (1998:9) also observed how they interact and play with one another. Sometimes the teachers have to retain this information in their heads until they have an opportunity to record it (Lawson 1998:27; Oldman 1998:46). Lawson (1998:27-28) recorded her observations at the end of the day either on a computer or in a binder, subdivided according to the children's names. Taft (1998:9) recorded them on dated loose sheets of paper to which she referred for the compilation of her reports. Stone (1998:33) had access to a computer programme that allowed her to record observations with ease. Larkin (1998:32) has experimented with several methods of recording observations over the years. These have ranged from 'post-it' notes, journals to a file-folder.

In the literature review, Forester and Reinhard (1989:209) make the following supportive comments about observation: "Because evaluation is based on observing children closely, children will receive more individual attention and teaching that is geared exactly to their needs."

6.1.2 Portfolios

In addition to observation, the teachers assessed by looking at samples of the children's work (Larkin 1998:33-34; Lawson 1998:28; Oldman 1998:48; Stone 1998:29; Taft 1998:8). The children's work was collected in portfolios which are "...a collection of artifacts or samples of student's work that provide a deeper, more thorough picture of a student's abilities." (Bacharach *et al* 1995:27).

In all the classrooms visited in this study, the children were allowed to choose what went into the portfolio: "...they take examples of maths and language and something that they feel is important to show their parents..." (Lawson 1998:28). The teacher may make suggestions about what should go into their portfolio. The children also develop filing skills during portfolio collection. Parents come to view the portfolios formally at report time but they also visit the classroom informally on a regular basis (Lawson 1998:26).



Photo 4: Portfolio collection

Portfolios appear to be a useful method of assessment in multigrade teaching. Since each child's portfolio is a unique indicator of his or her performance, it allows the teacher to focus on the individual child's needs and progress despite the diversity of age and grades. According to Bacharach *et al*,

Portfolios encourage the teachers to use a variety of indicators to evaluate students and to keep a detailed record of their achievements over time...This process-oriented, student-centered, ongoing system fits well into multiage classrooms.

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:28)

6.1.3 Peer evaluation and self-evaluation

Peer- and self-evaluation were practised in varying degrees in the classrooms. Larkin (1998:34,36) had a specific format of questions for both peer- and self-evaluation (annexure J).

Larkin coached the children for peer evaluation by asking them to consider the following type of questions; 'What did you like? Why did this happen? Is he/she right? What would you do differently?' (Ibid.). She referred to this as 'higher thought strategies' which encourage the children to think critically about their learning. Oldman (1998:8-9) believed that teachers in general, dwell on the product of the child's learning rather than encouraging them to reflect on the process of learning: "We do not ask our children to think enough".

Self-evaluation was practiced in Lawson's class (1998:28-29). As they engaged in buddy reading, the younger children would consider the following: "...Were my eyes on the person? Were my ears listening?" The older children would respond in writing to the following: "How did you feel about it? What did you learn?" (Lawson 1998:27). In Stone's class the children mark their mad minute tests and keep a graph of the results, which she believed is "...a picture of how they are getting better." (Stone 1998:25).

The learning logs, which were compiled by the children themselves, were a record of their activities and progress. It allowed for the teacher to monitor their progress and for the children to reflect on their own progress at the end of each week (Oldman 1998:6,8; Stone 1998:5). Oldman (1998:8) referred to this as 'metacognition': "I took Fridays to have the children go back in their mind to everything we had learned that week." Metacognition may be defined as the process of teaching children "about thinking as well as how to think" (*Primary Program* 1990:71). Stone (1998:7) would ask them to reflect on five things they had done during the week and then ask them, for example, "What did you learn in handwriting?" An answer to this may be "...to write on a line." For a kindergarten child, it may be something as seemingly mundane as, "I learned how to 'uhm', tie my shoes this week", but which is an important indicator of fine motor co-ordination for a kindergartner (Oldman 1998:9). The younger children may respond also through drawings (Oldman 1998:8). The learning logs were sent home with a form provided for the parents' response, for example, "I concur my child learned that because my child came home and showed me how to add with re-grouping..." (Oldman 1998:9).

6.2 Reporting

Reporting, an essential component of assessment, served to inform the teacher, the children, the parents and the school of the child's needs and development. Stone claimed that it is also useful for detecting those "...who slip through the cracks sometimes." (Stone 1998:15). The teachers used three methods of reporting: three- or two-way conferences, written reports, and brag nights.

In addition to these methods, some teachers had an informal system of meeting with parents on a more regular basis. Oldman set aside the first and last 15 minutes of

every day for a 'one on one' meeting with the parents (Oldman 1998:7,48). This is in keeping with the views of multigrade experts:

One of the keys to a multiage classroom involves close communication between school and home... (This) communication ...can take many forms...(including) conferences.

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:28)

6.2.1 Conferences

Some teachers used the three-way conferences (Oldman 1998:48; Stone 1998:31). Three-way conferences involve the child, teacher and parents meeting to share "...successes and concerns and to set goals for continual learning." (Bacharach *et al* 1995:28). In Stone's class, the children prepare for the conference by deciding what to show their parents about their work in the three learning areas; math, language arts and social studies (Stone 1998:32). The teacher encourages them to reflect on their work by asking open-ended questions such as: "what are you doing in writing that you did not do before?"(Ibid.). For Oldman (1998:49), an important aspect of the conferences was that the child, parents and the teacher "...wrote (the) goals together..." She emphasised the benefit of this practice to the child:

The children were the most aware because they knew exactly what their parents were worried about because they were involved in the conference. I really believe the children have the right to know what we talked about, to a degree.

(Oldman 1998:49)

The conferences "...were most fulfilling (to her) as a teacher." (Ibid.).

Larkin preferred two-way student led conferences during the first reporting period:

The kids take their portfolios, they arrange them all, they have all that ready. They practice with each other to make sure they will be able to tell their parents about everything, everything needs to be organised... It is student-led.

(Larkin 1998:36)

During the second reporting period, she conducted teacher-led conferences with the parents.

Conferences have been recognised as an effective method of reporting for the child, parent and teacher. Some experts claim that: “The parent-teacher conference is the approach most universally advocated in current literature of reporting and is probably the most fruitful and effective single means available.” (Goodlad and Anderson, as quoted in Bacharach *et al* 1995:28).

6.2.2 Written reports

Written reports for the parents, thrice per annum, are obligatory (Stone 1998:30-31; Larkin 1998:36-7). For the primary grades, i.e. 1 to 3, reporting is anecdotal. The report form has designated categories for the parents’ comments, which help them to be specific and solicits their involvement in the reporting process in a meaningful and relevant way (annexure J). The report includes an overview of the benchmarks so that the parents understand the school’s goals for the children (annexure I)

(Larkin 1998:36).

6.2.3 Brag nights

The ‘brag night’, which is a display and celebration of the children’s achievement, was used as a supplementary way of reporting to the parents and families. ‘Brag nights’,

...involve all the parents in an authentic way so that they feel they are part of this multi-age (classroom)... Everybody would be welcome...the preschoolers, grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles, anybody you want to brag to, so long as they were bragging about the curriculum covered...parents...got to interact with the curriculum, they got to interact with the teacher.

(Oldman 1998:8)

They may occur at the end of a theme or the year. The children lay out three things in each of the learning areas (language arts, maths and social studies) that they want to show their parents (Oldman 1998:47; Stone 1998:31). The family members are invited to attend and refreshments are served.

Discussion

Continuous assessment in the form of observations, portfolio collections, peer and self-evaluation, which was practised in the schools that were visited, was found to be child-centred, geared towards the individual needs of the children. This form of assessment was especially effective in the multigrade context where there were children of differing levels in one classroom. Paper and pencil or standardized tests, which assume that all children should be at the same point in their development at the same time, would not have worked well for the variety of levels and ages in these classrooms.

Nor are standardised tests in tune with current theories on how children develop.

According to Vygotsky, these tests are static since they do not take account of

...those functions that have not matured yet but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are in the embryonic stage...the actual developmental level characterizes mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal development characterizes mental development prospectively...

(Vygotsky 1978:86-87)

Thus, the individual has potential for developing beyond the current level of competence in a multigrade classroom.

The reporting procedures followed the principle of child-centredness. The purpose of reporting was to enable the teacher and parents to "...support the child's learning..." (*Primary Program* 1990:31). Conferences and written anecdotal reporting made this possible by helping individual children to understand and enhance their learning. These procedures are suited for the multigrade classroom where the children are of differing ages and grade levels.

In conclusion of this chapter, the following quotation makes compelling reading:

Our decisions about learning, teaching, assessment and evaluation must be congruent. We cannot espouse and implement one philosophy of learning and teaching, and evaluate from a totally different perspective.

(Anthony *et al*, as quoted in the *Primary Program* 1990:100)

CHAPTER SIX

TEACHING APPROACH AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

This chapter examines the teaching approach and instructional strategies employed in the multigrade classrooms visited. It is hoped that this analysis will demonstrate how these approaches and strategies enhanced the teachers' capacity to teach classrooms with a diversity of grades and ages.

1. TEACHING APPROACH

In order to contextualise the teaching approaches found in the multigrade classrooms visited in Canada, it may be appropriate to commence with a brief overview of current theories on child development and education and to determine whether multigrade teaching is consistent with these theoretical frameworks.

1.1 Theoretical Frameworks

There are several theoretical and philosophical frameworks about child development and education that lay the foundation for multigrade/multiage teaching (Bacharach *et al* 1995:9). These frameworks include the theories of Piaget, Bandura, Vygotsky, Erikson, Bronfenbrenner, Bruner and Montessori. These theories will be dealt with *seriatim*.

1.1.1 Piaget

Piaget theorised that learning was the product of experiential and maturational processes in the child (Wadsworth 1989:21-31). Children actively construct knowledge through their actions on their world and their interactions with people in that world. A state of disequilibrium leads to the accommodation of new concepts and hence knowledge is constructed. It would appear that the multigrade classroom with its diversity of ages, and consequent diversity of activities, stimulates the

experiential and maturational processes in the child. According to Lodish (1992:22), the interaction between older and younger children "...provides significant learning for younger children as they strive to accommodate the more advanced understanding of their class mates." (Lodish 1992:22).

1.1.2 Bandura

For social theorists like Bandura, development occurs through the observation, imitation of, and identification with others. Bacharach *et al* cites how Bandura views the cognitive aspect of children's learning as,

a continuous reciprocal interaction between individuals and their environments...Multiage classrooms provide a multiplicity of opportunities for younger children to emulate older children.

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:10)

1.1.3 Vygotsky

Vygotsky explains development in terms of his theory on the zone of proximal development which is defined as:

... the distance between (a child's) actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

(Vygotsky 1978:86)

Vygotsky's theory explains that because of the different levels of understanding within a multiage classroom, "Peers in multiage classrooms can facilitate development by assisting children in moving to the next level of understanding."

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:10). According to Chapman,

...(the) advocates of multiage classes suggest that teachers can apply Vygotsky's theory by capitalizing on a wider range than we would normally find in single grade classrooms, so that older or more able students can act as mentors of younger or less able children.

(Chapman 1995:416)

1.1.4 Erikson

According to Bacharach *et al*, Erikson proposed that:

...individuals face a series of psychological and social challenges as they develop. Success or failure in resolving the psychosocial conflicts of each stage of development is determined by the individual's relationships and by demands placed on them by society...Multiage relationships can serve to affect the resolutions of these stage conflicts.

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:11)

It would appear that the multigrade classroom with its diversity of age groups, provides greater opportunities for psychosocial conflicts and social challenges, which may result in greater opportunities for resolution and hence development.

1.1.5 Bronfenbrenner

The implication of Bronfenbrenner's theory for multigrade teaching is explained thus:

Development is the result of interrelationships of the child and all levels of society...A necessary continuity between school and home is made possible in a school setting that more closely represents a diverse world. Multiage classrooms, because of their diverse make-up, reflect the reality of the world.

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:12)

The multigrade/multiage classroom may provide richer kinds of interrelationships because of the diversity of ages and grade levels therein.

1.1.6 Bruner

For Bruner, "...education should serve as a means of training well-balanced citizens for a democracy." (Bruner, as quoted in Bacharach *et al* 1995:14). Bacharach *et al* points out that:

Of importance to Bruner is the student's interest in learning and acquisition of appropriate attitudes and values about intellectual activity. Multiage classrooms promote spiral curricula (which aids building on earlier concepts) as well as intellectual curiosity and excitement.

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:14)

It would appear that the interaction of older and younger children might assist the students in the acquisition of appropriate attitudes, values and morals for becoming well-balanced citizens.

1.1.7 Montessori

Montessori perceived that the child's impetus for development is both intrinsic and extrinsic. The child's "...real aim (is)...to master his environment, finding therein the means for his development" (Montessori 1968:89,94,167). It appears that the diversity of ages in a multigrade classroom contributes to a rich, stimulating and socially engaging environment which will enhance the child's development.

Montessori was explicit about her views on vertical age grouping, multiage grouping:

To segregate by age is one of the ...most inhuman things to do. It breaks the bonds of social life...It is an artificial isolation and impedes the development of the social sense... Our schools show that children of different ages help one another...There is a communication and a harmony between the two (children) that one seldom finds between the adult and the small child.

(Montessori 1988:205-206)

Discussion

It appears that Bacharach *et al* (1995) believe that these theoretical frameworks justify multigrade/multiage teaching. Put differently, it may be argued that multigrade teaching is not antithetical to current theories on child development.

1.2 Child-centred Approach

A child-centred approach may be defined broadly as a philosophical approach that views the child or learner as the focus of the teaching and learning process (*Primary Program* 1990:355; *Curriculum Framework* 1997:iv). Central to this concept is the account taken of the needs and interests of the child. This is consistent with Piagetian theorists' views that a strong need and interest in a child indicates a state of disequilibrium, which through appropriate experiences, may lead to the

acquisition of concepts (Wadsworth 1989:159). Other aspects of the child-centred approach (dealt with hereunder) include, for example, allowing children to develop at their own pace, participatory teaching, flexibility, dedication and commitment to the children and the avoidance of rote memorisation.

According to Bacharach *et al*,

A developmental, child-centered philosophy of learning guides multiage classroom practices. Teachers utilize various strategies, such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, self-directed and experience-based learning, and/or the whole language approach with theme-related activities... Curriculum and instructional strategies that are individualised and child-centered have been labeled 'developmentally appropriate practices' by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:3)

It is believed that "...developmental learning happens most naturally in settings that encourage daily interaction between children of different ages..." (*op cit.* xiv). They emphasise that "...multiage grouping reflects the NAEYC guidelines for educational practices that are developmentally appropriate." (Bacharach *et al* 1995:13).

In this study, a prominent feature of the teaching in the multigrade classrooms was the child-centred approach, with participatory and activity-based strategies. As alluded to earlier, the child is at the centre of the teacher's planning and teaching programme (Larkin 1998:21-2; Lawson 1998:17-18; Oldman 1998:1,17,19). This approach allows the teacher to relinquish a teacher-directed approach and assume instead, the role of a guide or facilitator, guiding the child's development in a carefully planned environment. Chapman (1998:12) and Lawson (1998:19) asserted that the children choose what they want to do but the teacher is there to guide them in making good choices. The philosophy behind this approach is encapsulated

succinctly by one of the teachers: "I know they are going to learn in spite of me." (Oldman1998:11). This sentiment conveys an implicit belief in and respect for the child with the necessary corollary of a diminished sense of ego on the teacher's part. Stone expressed this belief thus: "I think that as teachers, we have to trust ourselves and trust the kids that they want to learn... basically they want to learn." (Stone 1998:19). This view is substantiated by Montessori and Piaget who believed that the child has an intrinsic desire to learn (Montessori 1968:167; Ault 1977:177; 1980:105).

The need to move away from a teacher directed approach was emphasised by one teacher who recalled the time when she had to change her approach because the entire school was experiencing disciplinary problems. "I had to change. I could not use the approach where I was the boss." (Larkin 1998:14). In the literature review, one study found that teachers acknowledge that relinquishing their control and allowing for more learner-centredness was "...one of the most difficult changes to undertake, yet one of the most critical for the multiage program's success." (Bacharach and Hasslen, as quoted in Bacharach *et al* 1995:61). Other researchers have warned that:

...the drawback to direct instruction...is the tendency for the children to prematurely acquiesce, thus precluding the children's deeper consideration of potential differences in their own views of things and that of their teachers.

(Chase and Doan 1995:157)

It would appear that in terms of the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier, that a child-centred approach is conducive to the cognitive and psycho-social development of children of diverse ages and levels in a multigrade classroom.

1.2.1 The needs and interests of the child

An essential feature of the child-centred approach was that the teachers based their teaching on the needs of the child (Larkin 1998:10-11; Taft 1998:13). Larkin (1998:10-11) claimed that knowing the child's needs is the starting point for programme development. The teachers designed the activities to cater for the children's interests. A parent emphasised that "...the most important factor for (successful multigrade teaching) ...is knowing exactly... the child's needs..." (Penny 1998:8). Chapman asserted that for effective learning to take place, the children "...need to be interested in the activities." (Chapman 1998a:13). It would appear that in basing their program on the needs and interests of the individual children, the teachers ensured that the programme catered for the diversity of learners in the multigrade classroom.

1.2.2 Learner-paced approach

The children were allowed to proceed at their own pace (Stone 1998: 16,18). In Stone's class the younger children were allowed to try out the work assigned to the older group after they had completed their own tasks (annexure D-1).

1.2.3 Rote learning

Rote learning, which may be defined as memorisation without understanding (*Curriculum Framework for ECD*, 1997), was not in practice in these classrooms and was discouraged in the curriculum (*Primary Program* 1990:16-18; 69-71; Chapman 1998b:18). However, there was some memorisation of facts, for example multiplication tables and the 'mad minute' tests (Larkin 1998:31; Stone 1998:25). According to Stone, this practice had been prompted after she had discovered that some of the older children did not know the basics in maths:

I worked in the resource room for a little while and I realised some of the older kids that came in ...could not do their basic maths, they could not do division. That is when I realised that you have to memorise those.

(Stone 1998:25)

Stone's approach to rote memorisation with understanding is consistent with the view of Piagetian theorist, Wadsworth (1989:156).

1.2.4 Participatory approach

The teachers involved the children in various aspects of the teaching and learning process. In the first instance, as noted earlier, the teachers assessed the children's prior learning through the "Know-Wonder web" (Larkin 1998:22; Oldman 1998:1,32). A teacher explains this approach:

Very often before you start a topic...you say, ' what do you know about rocks' and they tell you everything they know about them. 'Is there anything in particular that you want to know (wonder) about rocks? Then you write that down. So you know what we are going to start learning about earth materials.

(Larkin 1998:22)

In this way, the children contribute to the content of the learning programme and the teachers take account of their needs and interests. For Stone (1998:32), it is not a matter of paying lip service to the idea of consulting children about their learning but "...giving it value, believing it when they say it instead of just asking. Really listening, you know, because they do know." (Ibid.). This is an indication of an implicit belief in and respect for the child. As noted, the children were involved in the development of the classroom rules (Larkin 1998:27; Lawson 1998:21-22; Stone 1998:19) (see chapter four, section 3).

1.2.5 Teacher qualities

The important qualities for a multigrade teacher were identified as flexibility, a relaxed and calm nature and a commitment to the "ethic of care" (Forester 1998:28).

The teachers' flexibility was demonstrated in the way they consulted the children in the design of the programme and through their disposition to readily change and adapt the programme to suit the changing needs of the children, over time (Lawson 1998:17-18; Stone 1998:11; Taft 1998:13,15,20). When I visited Stone's class, someone other than the child designated to 'show and tell' that day had brought in an 'Inuit' bone. The teacher allowed the child to share the bone with the class because it was related to their theme, the 'Arctic'. A further attestation to teacher flexibility was the way she accommodated a boy who was "always day-dreaming" instead of forcing him to conform (Stone 1998:39). She stated her attitude thus: "How much anxiety do I want to give myself? So I try to meet him halfway." (Ibid.). She simply reminds him that she expects him to do his best. Lawson (1998: 20) claimed that her method of grouping was flexible depending on the activity. Parent Dean (1998:10), after having observed multigrade and single grade classrooms decided that there was more "...flexibility ...in (the) multiage classroom, for sure."

In Bacharach and Hasslen's study (as quoted in Bacharach *et al* 1995:60), teachers advised that "...you must be open-minded and flexible, ...open-mindedness ensures that a teacher will not judge and try to redirect the student whose needs and interests are not the status quo."

In addition to flexibility, one teacher claimed that it was important for the teacher to be relaxed, while a parent asserted that the key to Lawson's success in managing the K to 7 multigrade classroom was her "calm and patient nature" (Taft 1998:20; Wren 1998:6).

My observations revealed that the dedication and commitment of the teachers were a fundamental part of their teaching approach. All the teachers evinced their commitment through their industriousness, their dedication to the programme, their respect for the children and the additional time they spent at school. Although the children were dismissed at 14h30, the teachers remained at school until 17h00 or even 18h00. Forester (1998:28) referred to their professional commitment as the “ethic of care”, an essential feature of good management which he strove to achieve in his school.

The teachers exhibited an innovative and creative disposition by always researching new ideas and ways of doing things (Oldman 1998:21; Stone 1998:34). Stone (1998:35) claimed: “I tend to like to try new things. Sometimes they work and sometimes they do not... I am always on the lookout for new things. ...looking through books...” Oldman (1998:21) stated that she was “...thinking about the next theme months in advance...I have been listening for new songs, I have been looking for new books...that I want to use.”

Discussion

It would seem that the teaching approaches evident in the multigrade classrooms under study are consistent with current theories on child development and education and the guiding principles of the curriculum (*Primary Program* 1990 15-43). These approaches included: child-centredness, developmentally appropriate practices catering for the needs and interests of the children, a participatory approach, flexibility, commitment, dedication, creativity and innovation. The teachers appeared to have an implicit belief in and respect for the child. This was evident in the way they interacted with the children and involved them in decision-making processes,

such as programme content and the establishment of classroom rules. It seemed that the teachers had adopted an approach of teaching children so they learn better and learning from children so they teach better.

2. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The teachers used a variety of instructional strategies. These included: thematic teaching, various grouping techniques, peer tutoring, self-directed learning, individualised learning, the use of learning centres in the classroom and to a lesser degree, team teaching.

2.1 Thematic Teaching

Thematic teaching, as discussed in detail in chapter five, was an especially useful instructional strategy in multigrade teaching because it helped the teacher to integrate the curriculum for teaching several grades and ages simultaneously. Bacharach *et al* (1995:25) asserts that “In a multiage classroom, theme teaching allows the students to share a common concept, yet provides the opportunity for each child to work on that concept at the appropriate developmental level.”

2.2 Grouping

The teachers utilised a variety of grouping techniques ranging from cooperative learning, whole class instruction to small group work. Chapman (1998:9) concurs with this approach, advocating “...the best thing to do is combinations of different kinds of groupings (for different purposes)...”.

2.2.1 Cooperative learning

Some respondents found cooperative learning an effective teaching strategy in the multigrade classroom (Chapman 1998a:10; Larkin 1998:14-5; Oldman 1998:10-11).

Cooperative learning, as opposed to the concept of co-operation, is a specific instructional technique and refers to:

...students working together in a group small enough for each student to participate in a clearly assigned collective task. Students are expected to carry out the task without direct and immediate supervision by the teacher. Cooperative learning has gained increasing acceptance as a strategy for fostering learning gains, developing higher order thinking, and encouraging prosocial behaviour. Cooperative learning has also gained acceptance as a way to manage academic heterogeneity in classrooms with a wide range of basic achievement skills. Most models of cooperative learning in fact advocate the use of heterogeneous groups, and there is considerable research showing that cooperative learning in heterogeneous groups is particularly beneficial for low-achieving students.

(Cohen, as quoted in Veenman 1995:373-4)

Larkin (1998:15-6) found that cooperative learning as an instructional technique enabled her to manage her multigrade class more effectively. Each child in the group had a designated task, for example, there was a materials collector, a recorder, a whisper keeper, a reporter and so on (Ibid.). The group had a common goal and they had to evaluate their work collectively. Through cooperative learning the children become 'positively interdependent', interactive, accountable to each other and develop team building skills (Johnson and Johnson 1994: 21-23).

Some researchers point to the benefits of cooperative learning for multigrade classes. According to Bacharach *et al* (1995:24), "The type of environment created through cooperative learning honors the diversity of individuals present in a multiage classroom and supports the concept of social learning." Slavin's research shows that cooperative learning enhances cognitive growth since multiage students have "considerable opportunity to learn from each other." (Slavin, as quoted in Bacharach *et al* 1995:16-17).

2.2.2 Whole group instruction

The teachers usually commenced their teaching with whole group instruction to introduce a lesson to the entire class i.e. all grades together (Forester 1998:25; Larkin 1998:9; Lawson 1998:13-14; Oldman 1998:27,28; Stone 1998:12,38; Taft 1998:22). Oldman (1998:27) cautioned the younger children that the information may be confusing but reassured them that they would hear it again the following year and added that they may even find it interesting. Her children had the choice of remaining for the rest of the lesson or undertaking the assigned seatwork. Larkin (1998:10) was of the opinion that "...if they (younger children) get it, good, if not, they have been exposed to it..." For Stone (1998:11) the grade 2's are part of the whole group instruction for grade 3's but they do not have to do the assigned work.



Photo 5: Grades K to 7 receive whole group instruction

Following the whole group instruction, the teachers assigned seatwork for the children to do either in small groups or individually. Stone (1998:38-39) explained that this technique freed her to move around the class and instruct small groups or individuals, whilst the other children were meaningfully engaged. Therefore, no time was wasted. Some teachers delivered the simplest part of the lesson to the whole group, which served as revision for the older children, and then assigned seatwork to some groups while continuing to teach the more complex aspects of the lesson to the remaining groups (Lawson 1998:19; Oldman 1998:27-28; Stone 1998:12). This method was suitable particularly for Lawson because there was insufficient time to teach the eight grades separately.

2.2.3 Small groups

Small group work usually followed the whole group instruction. In her class of eight grades, Lawson assigned seatwork to the lower grades as she proceeded until eventually, all grades had been assigned seatwork to do either in grade groups or individually (Lawson 1998:13,19). However, although they worked on tasks specific to their grades, they sat in mixed groups at the tables, i.e. primary and intermediate children sat together at the tables and discussed their work with one another, from time to time. Older children were observed mentoring the younger children and the sharing and nurturing nature of this interaction was fascinating to observe (annexure D-4).

Oldman (1998:28) assigned work not to age or grade groups but rather to ability groups: "Ability groups, I believe in that." The concept of 'multiple intelligences' influenced the way she grouped the children. She explained her understanding of this concept thus:

...this ability group may not be the same ability group that I choose an hour later because in terms of multiple intelligences we have children who may be way ahead in one thing but not so in another.

(Oldman 1998:28)



Photo 6: Teacher instructs 3 kindergartners while 3 girls from grade 4, 6 and 7 work at a table.

She illustrated with an example:

We have a little guy in here who is very bright but who cannot print. So he may be supported by a five-year old in printing, but can go ahead and read at a grade 6 level. So all along the way I model that we all can support one another in different ways. So when we do our different groupings it is often based on younger and older working together.

(Oldman 1998:28)

A clear distinction was drawn between needs grouping, which was favoured by some respondents, and ability grouping (Larkin 1998:11; Lawson 1998:17; Chapman 1998a:9-10). For Lawson (1998:20) needs grouping means "...what they need to do, like who needs to be working on this right now." Ability grouping is determined by

what the child can do now. The two strategies do not entail necessarily the same thing. Chapman (1998a:9-10) eschewed ability grouping because it highlights and perpetuates differences amongst children. It does not afford them the optimal benefits of mixed grouping. She found that her view on ability grouping was “...backed up by research.” (Chapman 1998a:9). Ability grouping was found “...to be unhelpful to, and indeed harmful for, many learners ...(since) it actually widens the gap between less able and more able learners.” (Eder 1981, Kulik and Kulik 1982, Allington 1983 and Shannon 1985, as cited in Chapman 1995:418). Slavin (1993:549), points out that ability grouping is “anti-egalitarian” and that there is no evidence that it has a positive effect on student achievement. These views are consistent with that reflected in the British Columbia curriculum where ability grouping is referred to as a “rigid structure” which if applied long-term, may affect children negatively (*Primary Program* 1990: 20,27).

Chapman (1998:11-12), as a teacher, had graded the learning activities, not the groups. This is not to say she had grade 3 and grade 4 activities. Instead, she developed an interesting system with activity cards called ‘green light’, ‘yellow light’ and ‘red light’ activities. Green light activities could be accomplished by most of the children. Yellow light activities meant, “...go slowly ...be more careful (and) red was ...red alert, ... that really makes you stop and think. But what I found was...a lot of the children go for the red-stop-think.” (Ibid.). She claimed: “...that was one of the ways that I could ... show a gradation in difficulty (Ibid.).

- Thus, the small groups were based either on grades (Lawson 1998:18-20) interest grouping (Chapman 1998a:10; Larkin 1998:10), needs grouping (Chapman 1998a:10;

Lawson 1998:20;), ability grouping (Oldman 1998:28) or social grouping (Larkin 1998:19; Stone 1998:9). Stone (1998:9) grouped grade 2's and 3's together based on their behaviour.

Two prominent researchers found that a popular teaching strategy was to assign seatwork to one grade while the teacher engaged the other grade in direct instruction (Gajadharsingh 1991:54; Veenman 1995:370). This strategy was not prominent at the schools in my study. Even in the K-7 classroom, where this strategy was evident, whole group teaching and instances of mixed small groups were practiced as well (Lawson 1998:14,19). The following statement by a principal corroborates my finding:

...teachers here really do plan for togetherness with the children. The grade 2/3 classroom that you were in, you would have noticed that the teacher had planned for, and was instructing the whole class...the teacher will not be involved totally in one grade (while) the other group is just doing practice worksheets or things to keep them quiet or things like that. The whole class is together...

(Forester 1998:25)

In a study by Gomulchuk and Piland (1995:31), teachers indicated they did not find separating grade groups within the class for instruction to be effective.

It was noted in chapter five that a key to managing the diversity of grades, ages, needs and ability in the classroom, regardless of the kind of grouping, was the teacher's practice of having different expectations for different children (Oldman 1998:28; Stone 1998:12-13; Taft 1998:4). For example, in a maths lesson the younger children would use manipulatives mainly, whereas the older children would represent the concepts symbolically through writing (Oldman 1998:31). If the older children reverted either in their work or in behaviour, Taft (1998:14) would "...just remind them of the expectations".

It appears that the system for separating school children into strict age groups goes against the natural preferences of children. Of some interest, is a survey of children at a school in British Columbia conducted by Chapman in which she discovered that the children were most partial to the small group strategy (Chapman 1998a:3-4).

2.3 Peer Tutoring

There were many instances where the children tutored, mentored and supported one another in the classroom (Lawson 1998:16,23-24; Oldman 1998:34). Chapman (1995:421) distinguished between mentoring and tutoring: the former occurred informally, initiated usually by younger children while tutoring was facilitated by the teacher. In this study, the teachers used the terms interchangeably.

Taft (1998:11) purported that it was not only the older children who helped the younger children but rather the more competent or helpful children, irrespective of their age, helping others. Oldman (1998:8) cited the example of a 5 year old child who helped a 9 year old child to turn on the computer. In Lawson's class (1998:16,24), there was a rule that tutors were not allowed to undertake any work on behalf of those being tutored. I observed an interesting incident where a fourth grader intervened and indignantly told the third grader, who had gone beyond mere mentoring of a first grader: "Don't do his work for him!" (annexure D-4).

For reading, the buddy system was used and appeared to be successful (Stone 1998:27; Taft 1998:13). In Larkin's class (1998:26), one child reads while the another listens and a third child records their views on for example, whether the language was good, the pictures were appropriate, what idea was being conveyed and making predictions about the story. In this way, the teacher has primed them to

engage in, what she termed, “high level questioning.” (Ibid.). She encouraged them to avoid simplistic questions such as; “what was the boy’s name?” or, “what colour dress was she wearing?” (Ibid.).



Photo 7: Grade 7 girl tutors two K boys while a grade 3 boy looks on

A benefit for the teacher was that peer tutoring released her from whole class instruction and direct teaching and allowed for the instruction of small groups or individuals (Stone 1998:39). Researchers have found that teachers in multigrade classrooms are more likely to ‘rely heavily’ on cross-age tutoring (Miller 1991:5; Chase and Doan 1994:150). Chapman (1995:421) found that peer tutoring in Politano’s class included same age and older and younger partners. Interestingly, teacher Politano (Ibid.), like teacher Stone (1998:46) believed that in her class of 24, she had 25 teachers rather than 1 teacher and 24 children. Chase and Doan (1994:156) posit that “In multiage grouping, children have many potential mentors in addition to their teacher.”

Peer tutoring appeared to be beneficial in promoting good social relations between the children, especially between older and younger children in the classroom. According to Bacharach *et al*,

Peer tutoring... has been shown to enhance both the tutor and tutee's academic performance...self esteem and confidence and leads to better social relationships and more positive attitudes...Tutees often grasp material more readily when it is presented by a peer.

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:25)

Johnson and Johnson (1994:191) make similar claims: "... considerable research indicates that many students may learn better from their peers than from adults and that many students benefit greatly from teaching other students." They claim the following additional benefits:

- More effective communication
- Greater motivation through peer encouragement
- Integration of slower learners through deep bond of friendships that are developed
- Less pressure on teacher, especially when teaching large classes.

2.4 Self-directed Learning

This strategy often followed whole group instruction, as was observed in several classrooms (Lawson, Oldman, Stone, field notes – annexure D). Stone believed that self-directed learning allowed her the opportunity to engage in small group or individualised tuition (Stone 1998:39). She claimed that most of her children in grade 2/3 were capable of working independently. Their capacity to do so may have been enhanced through the use of this strategy in the multigrade classroom (Ridgeway and Lawton, cited in Chase and Doan 1994:150). Larkin (1998:9) administered individualised tests from time to time to ascertain whether the children were accomplishing the work by themselves or depending on others in the cooperative group.

2.5 Individualised Teaching

This study found that teachers in multigrade classrooms had sufficient opportunities to engage in individualised teaching on a one to one basis. These opportunities were afforded by engaging the children meaningfully in the other instructional strategies such as group work, peer tutoring, self-directed learning and learning centres, where older children may play mentoring roles.

Taft (1998:22), after allocating seatwork, positioned herself at a table so that the children could approach her for individualised help. Oldman (1998:35) allocated 25 minutes each day for individualised teaching. In her study of Politano's class, Chapman (1995:422) found that "one on one instruction" often occurred informally and complemented whole class and group instruction.

2.6 Learning Centres

Learning centres were a feature of the classroom arrangement in all the classes visited. They included:

- book corners
- computer centres
- creative or construction centres, where the children could engage in art or construction work
- a science centre, where there were various scientific materials like magnets, globes, feathers and soil samples.

The children had free access to these areas after they had completed their assigned tasks or during periods allocated specifically for activities of their own choice. For example in Lawson's class, some kindergartners were busy in the creative/construction centre, while the others worked on the computers.

The learning centre stimulated the children and involved them in self-directed or group activity while the teacher was free to undertake other forms of instruction, including individualised teaching. According to Bacharach *et al*,

Learning centres include collections of materials and activities ranging from concrete to abstract. Students interact with the centres to learn, reinforce, or apply concepts. Because learning centres provide a variety of stimuli, they tend to meet the diverse learning styles and abilities within a (multigrade) classroom.

(Bacharach *et al* 1995:23)

2.7 Team Teaching

Team teaching, in the sense that teachers planned together and instructed each other's classrooms, was not practiced by the teachers. However, the classroom teacher would meet with support staff to discuss a child's needs and the support teacher would then be responsible for developing a programme for that particular child (Hines 1998:13-14; Forester 1998:8-9). At School 1, the First Nations support worker adopted an antibias approach by assisting not only the First Nations children but any of the children requiring help. This avoided a focus on a particular group of children in the class.

At Forester's school, the entire staff planned the curriculum implementation as a team (Forester 1998:19; Stone 1998:21). This allowed them to manage and implement the curriculum more effectively in a multigrade environment. It also helped them to curb possible overlaps and gaps in programme content.

Discussion

It would appear that there is no 'one best way' to teach in a multigrade classroom but rather for teachers to use a variety of different strategies, taking into account the needs of the children and the context in which the learning occurs. McClellan argued

that "...increased opportunities for children of disparate ages to socialize and work together deepen and enhance the effectiveness of educational environments and strategies." (McClellan, as quoted in Chase and Doan 1994:147).

Whole class instruction followed by small groups, peer tutoring or self-directed learning appeared to be the most popular approach. Mixed grouping was preferred to homogenous grade grouping and it resulted in increased opportunities for sharing, growth and development amongst the learners. According to Chase and Doan (1994:156-7) this view is consistent "...with basic tenets to both Piaget's and Vygotsky's thinking."

Cooperative learning and peer tutoring seemed well suited to multigrade teaching as was demonstrated by Larkin and others and confirmed by the research (Chase and Doan 1994:156; Regional Laboratory study 1994:7; Bacharach *et al* 1995:24; Gomulchuk and Piland 1995:30; Veenman 1995:373-4). These strategies in turn allowed the teacher opportunities for individualised instruction, which is necessary for effective learning. In classrooms where there is too much direct teaching, there will be fewer opportunities for individualised instruction. Multigrade classrooms almost force the teacher to adopt a variety of strategies since it is not possible to stand in front of the class and deliver a lesson which will cater for the learning needs of all the children in a multigrade classroom.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PARENT SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT

A sample of eight parents were interviewed to examine their attitudes toward multigrade teaching, as indicated through their support for multigrade teaching and their involvement in the school.

1. PARENT SUPPORT

All the parents, except one, were supportive of multigrade teaching for their children (Becker 1998:1-2; Canon 1998:3; Dean 1998:10; Hill 1998:1; Penny 1998:1; Wren 1998:1; Sauer 1998:B-20). Most of the teachers professed that their parents were supportive of this form of teaching (Lawson 1998:31; Oldman 1998:6,9; Stone 1998:43). Larkin (1998:38) was the only teacher who claimed that "...a lot of parents hate it...". Unfortunately, none of her parents were interviewed, so I am unable to compare her perception with those of the parents themselves.

Initially, some parents had been sceptical about multigrade teaching, but their fears were allayed as they spent time in the classroom observing the programme (Becker 1998:2; Penny 1998:4). One parent related her initial concerns thus: "...I walked in the first day and I thought, 'my gosh...' There were all the different levels...I could not believe that it was going to be a good year for Megan. I was very sceptical..." (Penny 1998:4). Later, she became supportive:

...as the time went on and I saw how the dynamics of the classroom worked. How the kids were being challenged. How the ones that were struggling were being helped by other children and, of course, their self-esteem just grew, like the children that ...were helping other children. It was really neat to watch the children develop into nice little people.

(Penny 1998:4)

Parent Wren (1998:1) expressed her attitude about her grade 1 son and grade 4 daughter being in the same classroom thus; "I think it is really great. I really like it... their team work...the closeness...". Another parent claimed that "It works really well because the kids learn from each other." (Penny 1998:1).

One parent believed that the multigrade classroom was too loose and unstructured (Bellini 1998:6,10). She was "...not convinced that they (multigrade classes) do work." (Bellini 1998:4). However, she had difficulty in defending her view (Bellini 1998:8-9) and her explanations indicated that she was disenchanted with the whole education system in British Columbia and not just multigrade teaching *per se*. She believed that the absence of textbooks, standardised testing, measurable goals and drilling of children in the basics attributed to the decline in educational standards (Bellini 1998:3,8,9).

The following statement by Gajadharsingh may explain her view:

Presumably, a parent feels that no learning is taking place if the teacher is not engaged in direct instruction. What parents see as a disadvantage may be an advantage because research shows that students develop such traits as independence, dependability and self-reliance...(in multigrade environments).

(Gajadharsingh 1991:11)

The concerns raised by some parents centered on the combination of three grades or of primary and intermediate grades (Forester 1998:25-26; Larkin 1998:42; Stone 1998:43). Although the community did not favour the combination of three grades, Forester (1998:1,25) predicted that there would be a grade 2/3/4, a grade 4/5/6 and a grade 5/6/7 classroom the following year because of the enrolment figures. He

explained that the main concern would be for the grade 2/3/4 combination because it combined primary and intermediate grades:

...those parents will have to be convinced by myself and my staff that being in the 2/3/4 class is not going to inhibit their education...because the feeling is that the children...are receiving far more primary level material than they should be...

(Forester 1998:26)

Chapman (1998:3) found that parents preferred their children to be the younger children in the classroom. There were similar findings in the literature review:

...parents often worry about their child's continued progress as he or she becomes one of the older children in a multiage classroom. Although these fears evaporate when parents see a well-implemented multiage classroom.

(Chase and Doan 1994:159)

Parent Bellini (1998:1), stated that "...there are a lot of advantages if the child is in the lower grade... (but) when the child is in the higher grade they are not stimulated as much...". Despite this view, she cited as advantages for the older children, the development of leadership, mentorship and social skills (Ibid.).

Principal Hines (1998:3-4) was convinced that most of the parents at her school were supportive because the teachers were good particularly at inviting them into the class, giving them information and allaying any fears and concerns. An 'open door policy', information evenings, open days, 'brag nights' and newsletters helped to allay fears and developed positive attitudes among the parents towards multigrade teaching (Dean 1998:7; Oldman 1998:7,8,9,11). Researchers, Forester and Reinhard (1989:238) support the view of "keeping parents informed".

Most teachers encouraged and invited their parents to spend time in the classroom (Lawson 1998:26; Oldman 1998:7,8; Stone 1998:44). Parent Penny (1998:3,4)

believed that the information evening and being allowed into the classroom to observe the teacher helped to change her attitude. She proudly confessed, "I basically lived there." (Ibid.) Dean (1998:10) stated: "As parents we were welcome to come in. That truly changed my way of thinking around parents' involvement". The experience had such an impact on her that she decided to pursue a career in teaching:

This is where real... learning takes place, (in) this kind of atmosphere and I really do think that multiage had something to do with it very much. You know, if it makes that kind of difference when a parent who is coming in and (getting) involved and watching what is going on in the class just imagine what it is doing for the children. It was absolutely amazing.

(Dean 1998:10)

Some parents championed the importance of communication between the teachers and parents (Canon 1998:4; Penny 1998:9). Teacher Oldman (1998:7) allocated the first and last 15 minutes of each day to 'chat' with the parents. According to her, "...that half an hour a day was really worth it because they became the strongest advocates you can imagine." (Ibid.). This practice is advocated in the literature review: "Parents who are enthusiastic about multiage groups act as avenues for communication and provide marvelous PR to other parents and community members." (Bacharach *et al* 1995:62).

The parents from the school where Oldman had first piloted the multiage model, wept when she transferred to the new school (Oldman 1998:6). They attended the information evening at the new school to convince the new parents of their positive experiences in multigrade teaching (Dean 1998:4; Oldman 1998:7). Dean (1998:4) claimed, "I cannot recall very many parents who, after they went through the process of having their kids in the classroom that did not like it." She stated her preference

for multigrade over single grade teaching, unequivocally: “Yes, I would definitely prefer multi-age classrooms.”(Dean 1998:7).

Oldman (1998:49) also found that it was essential for teachers and parents to discuss their expectations for the children’s learning. A parent corroborated this view; “...once every two or three months we sit down and have a very long chat about my expectations, her expectations, how we can adapt...” Penny (1998:5).

2. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Aside from their support and positive attitudes, many of the parents were involved in the classroom. The degree of parental involvement differed from school to school and included:

- fundraising,
- making decisions about the budget and expenditure,
- all decision-making,
- helping to organise field trips,
- helping with themes and the preparation for art and creative activities,
- supplying waste materials to the school for use in various project and activities,
- doing presentations on their cultural or professional lives,
- parents or senior citizens volunteering to listening to groups of children read and,
- parents providing academic support to their own children in maths or reading in the classroom.

(Forester 1998:11-12; Hines1998:21; Larkin 1998:7; Lawson 7-8; Taft 1998:23)

At the one-roomed school, probably because of its size and rural location, the parents participated in all decision-making, which led them to be supportive of the school (Hill 1998:2; Lawson 1998:31; Wren 1998:5). At another school, the parent interviewed was the chairperson of the Parents Advisory Committee (PAC) (Canon

1998:5). These committees appeared to be a common feature of school governance in British Columbia and were a vehicle for effective parent involvement in the schools.

At some of the schools, the parents helped in the classroom. Parents were observed listening to individual children read, helping with the preparation of 'sushi'⁹ under the theme, 'Japan' and supervising art (annexure D-3). At the one-roomed school, a parent helped her grade 5 daughter and friends with maths (annexure D-4). In School 2, a parent read to some children while the teacher taught maths to another group of mixed ages¹⁰. Parent Penny (1998:3) claimed: "Last year, I actually volunteered my services in teaching music in (my son's) class..." According to the chairperson of a Parent Advisory Committee, senior citizens in the community also come in to help with reading (Canon 1998:14).



Photo 8: A parent helps her grade 4 daughter and a friend.

⁹ A Japanese dish consisting of seaweed, rice and fish.

¹⁰ According to the collective agreement, parents were not allowed to help teach but they may help their own child. In this way, they could informally help their child's classmates.

The relationship was a reciprocal one. At the one-roomed school, the two parents interviewed made use of the school's computer for their own studies (Wren 1998:5).

Hence, there was a strong sense of community between the school and the parents.

This parental involvement in the schools did not appear to interfere with the teacher's role or control of the classroom. It was supportive and complementary. Parents acknowledged that the teacher was the professional and they respected this (Canon 1998:18-19; Hill 1998:1).

Discussion

There was evidence of a great deal of parent support and involvement in the multigrade classrooms under study. The teachers appeared to have been instrumental in achieving this through a good rapport with the parents. Through their support and involvement, these parents exhibited a positive attitude towards multigrade teaching. It may be concluded that parent support and involvement is essential for successful multigrade teaching. This approach is consistent with the curriculum policy guidelines which state that:

Parents are invited to:

- be active partners in the education of their child; ...
- take part in the life of the classroom and the school in a variety of ways...

(Primary Program 1990:22)

A review of the literature on multigrade teaching seems to support my findings that parent support and involvement are important for successful multigrade teaching:

“One of the most powerful prerequisites to successful implementation of multiage classrooms is parent support.” (Goodlad and Anderson, Hunter, Lewis and Miller, cited in Byrnes *et al* 1994:15). Chapman (1995:417) and Bacharach *et al* (1995:62)

asserted that a good relationship and communication between parents and teachers is crucial. A study by the Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement (1994:7), showed that "Parents and community members can also be helpful as resource persons."

Some researchers found that negative parent attitudes may be attributed to a lack of information and understanding of multigrade teaching (Gajadharsingh 1991:1; Veenman 1995:323). According to Gajadharsingh:

The concerns of parents, and teachers, usually relate to their intuitive hunches about the effect of being in a multi-grade classroom...The literature shows that parents are much less apprehensive and more supportive of the value of multi-grade as an alternative to the standard single-grade when they understand what's going on.

(Gajadharsingh 1991:1)

It would appear that if the parents were opposed to multigrade teaching for their children, they could have sent them to another school (Hines 1998:3; Lawson 1998:35-36). For example, Hines' school is situated in the city where there are other options for the parents, including parent Bellini who disliked multigrade teaching. According to Lawson (1998:36), a bus service was available to transport children to schools in neighbouring towns, approximately 30 minutes away. Yet, the parents chose to send their children to the multigrade schools. The reason that the parents chose the multigrade schools may be that the parents do not believe that their children are affected negatively by multigrade teaching. On the contrary, most parents in the study lauded the many advantages of multigrade teaching.

CHAPTER EIGHT
COGNITIVE AND NON-COGNITIVE EFFECTS
OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING

All the respondents had experienced both single and multigrade teaching and they were asked if they perceived any difference in the impact of single grade teaching versus multigrade teaching on the cognitive and non-cognitive development of the children. Their responses were based on their own perceptions and not on any specific research conducted by them. The indicators for the cognitive development included the acquisition of concepts, cognitive maturity and the academic performance of the children in the multigrade classroom and their subsequent academic performance, for example, in high school. The non-cognitive indicators included psycho-social factors such as a sense of independence and social responsibility, a good self-esteem, co-operation, good peer relations and social skills.

1. COGNITIVE EFFECTS OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING

All the respondents commented positively on the cognitive development of children in the multigrade classrooms, including teacher, Larkin who expressed a strong dislike for multigrade teaching. Some respondents claimed that the cognitive development of children in multigrade classes was the same as that of children in single grade classes (Forester 1998:25; Hines 1998:22; Larkin 1998:40; Lawson 1998:37). Some of the past students from Lawson's K to 7, one-roomed school had been placed on the Honours Roll for academic achievement at high school, while others had received the highest award in the province for academic achievement, the Governor-General's award (Lawson 1998:37). According to her, the high-at-risk children reap better cognitive benefits in a multigrade classroom than in a single grade classroom where, she believed, their specific needs might be overlooked and

they may “fall through the cracks” (Lawson 1998:37). Forester (1998:25) believed that multigrade classrooms did not have less of an impact cognitively because the teachers integrated the grades for teaching purposes.

Other respondents professed that there was greater cognitive development for both younger and older children in a multigrade class because it offered more opportunities for the children to grasp new concepts, to be challenged and to excel (Oldman 1998:38; Stone 1998:45; Taft 1998:21). Larkin (1998:41) claimed that the children in the lower grades were likely to have a greater advantage in cognitive development than their single grade counterparts because of their exposure to more advanced concepts in a multigrade environment. Even Bellini, the parent who expressed a negative attitude towards multigrade teaching, recognised that there were cognitive gains for the younger children in the classroom in that they are stimulated to the higher levels of the older children (Presiozi 1998:1,4). Chapman (1998:3), who had taught previously both single and multigrade classes, was of the view that the grade 1 children in a grade 1/2 multigrade class seemed “more advanced” and “grown up” than their counterparts in single grade classrooms. She attributed this to their emulation of the older, grade 2, children in the class. As noted, Vygotsky’s theory of cognitive development (the zone of proximal development) would support the view that the younger children are challenged to grasp new concepts through their collaboration with older children (Vygotsky 1978:86; Bacharach *et al* 1995:10; Chapman 1995:416).

However, the benefits did not accrue to the younger children alone. Chapman (1998:15) professed that “cognitive enhancement” affected the older children as well.

Teaching others sharpens one's own thinking and stimulates deeper thought processes about seemingly familiar concepts (Johnson and Johnson 1994:191; Chapman 1998a:15). According to McKernan (1996:48), knowledge is developed through apprenticeship.

Oldman (1998:38), who was very passionate about multigrade teaching expressed a stronger view. She argued that children in a single grade classroom are "severely deprived of their academic development" in comparison to children in a multigrade classroom, who are constantly made aware of the goal or outcome of their learning through their observation of the older children in the classroom. So,

...going from being the youngest in the group to the oldest in the group, (they) are academically so much more secure...through the progression of skills because they have watched them being taught from the day they first came in...so they see (not only) the progression, but ...also how they progress within it.
(Oldman 1998:38)

Oldman postulated that this contributes to their sense of academic security and is "...really integral to how well they learn academically."(Ibid.).

The parents were of the view that multigrade teaching, in comparison to single grade teaching, did not have a negative impact on the cognitive development of children. On the contrary, parent Dean (1998:5) avowed that there was greater opportunity for a child to progress cognitively in a multigrade classroom. Like Oldman, she believed that the older children are a beacon of what the younger children can achieve, while the younger children chart where the older children have come from (Oldman 1998:38). In this way, the children are able to evaluate constantly their own progress through observing their fellow students who symbolise 'performance indicators'.

Discussion

It was found that all the respondents, except for parent Bellini who believed that there were gains for younger but not older children, were of the view that children in multigrade classrooms fared as well as, and in some instances even better than their counterparts in single grade classrooms. This view, which was based on their own experiences and observations of the children over time, was attributed to the increased opportunities for collaboration between older and younger children afforded through multigrade grouping. This finding is supported by major research studies on the cognitive effects of multigrade teaching (Way 1981:74; Brown and Martin 1989:165; Gajadharsingh 1991:55; Miller 1991:1; Veenman 1995:319). For example, the Canadian Education Association study of multigrade teaching in Canada found that:

Over 85% of respondents assessed the cognitive development in the four listed disciplines of multi-grade students as 'comparable' or 'superior' to students in equivalent single grades.

(Gajadharsingh 1991:55)

This finding was verified by his own review of other studies: "Almost all the research shows that academic achievement of multi-grade students is equal or superior." (Gajadharsingh 1991:16).

Another Canadian researcher, stated that

We can affirm beyond a shadow of a doubt that being enrolled in a combined class has no negative effect on school marks. Rather, the study indicates a tendency toward an improvement in scholastic achievement.

(Perras, as quoted in Gajadharsingh 1991:25)

An American researcher, Miller (1991:1), reviewed 21 quantitative studies and found that students in multigrade classrooms performed academically as well as students from single grade classrooms. In a study of a rural, two-roomed school of 35

children, spanning five grades it was found that: "In terms of academics, (rural) students performed nearly the same as their urban counterparts. ...the five-grade classroom can be a socially and academically effective learning environment for students." (Dodendorf, as quoted in Miller 1991:4,5). This finding supports teacher Lawson's (1998:37) contention that the children in her K to 7 classroom were academically comparable to children from single grade classrooms.

While the literature reviews conducted by Gajadharsingh and Miller were extensive, they were limited to studies conducted in Canada and the United States with minor references to some studies conducted in England. In an African study conducted by Jarousse and Mingat, students,

...were found to achieve significantly higher language and mathematics scores when compared to students in the same grade level in the single grade classes... For classes with more than 55 students, the negative effects of class size on student achievement were found to be more moderate for the schools with multigrade classes than for the schools with single grade classes.

(Jarousse and Mingat, as quoted in Veenman 1995:343)

While overcrowding was not a problem in the Canadian schools, due to the size specifications in the teacher contracts, the African study may be significant for multigrade classrooms in South Africa where overcrowding is a problem.

On a wider scale, Veenman, reviewed the international research for "the best evidence with regard to the cognitive and non-cognitive effects of multigrade/multi-age versus single-grade/single-age classes in elementary schools." He concluded:

...parents, teachers, and administrators need not worry about the academic progress ...of students in multigrade or multi-age classes. They are simply no worse, and no better, than single-grade or single-age classes.

(Veenman 1995:367)

2. NON-COGNITIVE EFFECTS OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING

Most of the respondents claimed that, in terms of non-cognitive development, children in multigrade classrooms fared better than their counterparts in single grade classrooms. All pointed to the psychosocial and emotional benefits of multigrade teaching such as independence, cooperation, sense of responsibility, understanding and caring nature, friendliness, self-esteem, social skills, problem-solving, open-mindedness and role-modelling (Chapman 1998a:16; Dean 1998:4-5; Hill 1998:2; Larkin 1998:42; Lawson 1998:37; Stone 1998:46; Taft 1998:21; Wren 1998:4).

Principal Hines (1998:23), who had been in both multi- and single grade schools, cited greater depth of friendship, good peer relations, acceptance of responsibility, modelling of behaviour, consideration and care for others, especially concerning children with special needs, as some of the psychosocial benefits. According to teacher Stone (1998:46), the children are more developed socially and emotionally because there are 15 role models (grade3's) for her grade 2 children. Oldman (1998:39) pointed out that the parents were clamouring to have their children placed at her school because of these perceived psychosocial and emotional benefits of multigrade teaching.

For parent Penny (1998:6-7), self-esteem was the key for growth and learning: "I believe as a parent that if a child's self-esteem is good then they will grow and they will want to learn and they will feel good about what they are learning." This applied especially to children who were either shy, immature or needed to work at a slower pace but could remain in a classroom of their peers (Penny 1998:7,10).

Gajadharsingh (1991:27) supports this view that children who underachieve as a result of a lack of motivation or mild socio-affective problems, may benefit from a multigrade classroom where the socio-affective aspects of child development are catered for.

Discussion

All the respondents believed that in respect of their non-cognitive development, children in multigrade classrooms fared better than their counterparts in single grade classrooms. This view, which was based on their experiences and observations of the children over time, was attributed mainly to the increased interaction and family atmosphere present in multigrade classrooms. In particular, it was asserted that the multigrade classroom contributed to the development of a good sense of self-esteem among the children, which was essential both to the cognitive and non-cognitive development of children.

The literature review in my study corroborates the views of the respondents. More significantly for this chapter is the study of multigrade teaching in Canada which found:

In assessing the psycho-social development of multi-grade students...more than 80% of respondents (teachers and principals) stated that multigrade students were comparable or superior to their counterparts in single grades.

(Gajadharsingh 1991:55)

According to Gajadharsingh,

The specific traits that researchers have isolated as comparable or superior are independence, dependability, confidence, responsibility, co-operation with others, interaction skills, social skills, study habits and attitudes towards school... The youngest feel more secure, demonstrate more assurance and feel more appreciated; the oldest develop a social sense and a spirit of co-operation.

(Gajadharsingh 1991:15,24)

Miller found that “In terms of affective measures, however, multigrade students outperformed their single grade counterparts at a statistically significant level.” (Miller 1991:1). While, Veenman (1995:367), in his international ‘best evidence’ research found that:

...in affective areas such as attitudes towards school, self-concept, and personal and social adjustment, students are sometimes better off in multigrade and multiage classes than in single-grade or single age classes.

(Veenman 1995:367)

Thus in terms of their cognitive and non-cognitive development, children in multigrade classrooms fare as well as, and in some instances even better than their counterparts in single grade classrooms.

CHAPTER NINE

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING

This chapter deals with the respondents' views on the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade teaching. The previous chapter on the cognitive and non-cognitive benefits of multigrade teaching, should be read in conjunction with this chapter.

1. ADVANTAGES

All the respondents, including the parent and the teacher who were not in favour of multigrade teaching, believed that there were advantages to multigrade teaching for the children. Some believed that there were advantages for both the children and the teachers.

1.1 Family-like, Nurturing Environment

Most of the advantages perceived by the respondents correspond with the non-cognitive benefits of multigrade teaching, for example, the 'family' environment created in a multigrade class, where there is a 'lot of natural nurturing' (Canon 1998:12; Chapman 1998a:2; Dean 1998:1; Hill 1998:1-2; Lawson, 1998:7). In particular, the respondents highlighted the closeness amongst the children in multigrade classes and the stability which created a sense of security for the children (Canon 1998:11; Dean 1998:2; Lawson 1998:7-8; Wren 1998:1). A striking example of this nurturing environment, where children are humane and warm towards others, was demonstrated by the way the older children in the one-roomed school, spanning grades K to 7, adjust their games to accommodate the younger children. The older children hold their hockey sticks down in order to avoid hurting the younger children (Lawson 1998:7). Oldman (1998:41), cited how a former student, who was now in grade 7 had had the courage to inform her recently that his mother had breast cancer

and to explain what it meant to a younger child present. He was cognisant also of the need to share his interesting experiences with his mother during her trying days. One day, while watching an exciting skating show, he exclaimed, “I can hardly wait to share this with my mum!” (Oldman 1998:11).



Photo 9: Grades K to 7- family-like interaction in the gym.

1.1.1 Social interaction

The presence of a family atmosphere in a multigrade classroom as opposed to a competitive peer group environment encouraged the children to be less prone to peer group pressure. Instead, they learn “...to relate in a positive way with people of all different ages.” (Ibid.). The younger children emulated the older children and the older were more supportive, accommodating and considerate towards the younger children (Becker 1998:1; Bellini 1998:1; Dean 1998:2-4; Lawson 1998:12; Penny

1998:4; Wren 1998:1). Parent Wren (1998:1) postulated that the older children did not resent the presence of younger children because they had been in that position previously. Some parents believed that these benefits spread into the home environment too where there was more evidence of sharing and co-operation (Dean 1998:3; Wren 1998:2).

1.2 Diversity

The nurturing environment of the multigrade classroom was advantageous for responding to the diversity of the classroom, such as mixed ability, culture, special needs, gender, and language.

1.2.1 Mixed ability

The potential inflexibility of the single grade classroom to accommodate diversity in ages and levels was captured succinctly by Oldman:

...what about those little guys that are eight, but conceptually, are having a terrible time with adding?...But also, what about that poor K child who comes in completely understanding multiplication, that they are not going to see till they are in grade 2, those little guys can come in and they have the opportunity not to be stifled...I mean if they are reading when they come to you when they are four, what am I going to do? Tell them they are not allowed to read?

(Oldman 1998:31-32)

Stone (1998:18) stated that she had a grade 3 child who should have been in grade 4 but was only reading at a grade 1 level. On the other side of the spectrum was a grade 2 child in Lawson's class who responded to maths questions intended for the higher grades. Lawson concurred that in a multigrade class all children are exposed to what is going on, so "...when they are hearing things that older kids are doing...they are ready to connect the information..." Lawson (1998:9).

Many single grade classes have children of mixed ability yet the classroom environment and teaching programme do not cater for the needs of these children. As one teacher explained, the multigrade classroom

...is good for the children because it gives those children that need a challenge, (it) gives them the opportunity. They can try things at the higher grade level and then it gives those children that need extra help, they can work at a lower grade level... So I think it works best for the kids, allows (them) to work at their own pace...

(Taft 1998:20)

A parent shared her experience as a child in a grade 1/2 combination class. Although a first grader, she had been performing at a grade 2 level. Her teacher and parents had discussed acceleration and considered moving her into a different grade 2 classroom. However, on the basis of her level of emotional development, it was decided that her needs were being met holistically right there in the multigrade classroom. Academically and cognitively, she had worked with the higher grade but emotionally, she had socialised with her own grade group: "...I was very pleased that they left me with my own peer group, but I was still being challenged." (Penny 1998:11).

1.2.2 Cultural diversity

The First Nations support teacher believed that the multigrade classroom was beneficial for culturally diverse groups for all the reasons mentioned above, and because the older First Nations children could support and comfort the younger First Nations children (Stampier 1998:5). This benefit of multigrade teaching is especially useful where there are minority or disadvantaged groups of children within the school.

1.2.3 Special educational needs

Multigrade teaching was found particularly advantageous for children with special needs (Canon 1998:14; Greene 1998:4; Hines 1998:23; Lawson 1998:9; Oldman 1998:36; Penny 1998:8-9; Stone 1998:13; Taft 1998:12). The learning assistance teacher, who modified programmes for children with special needs, was of the opinion that the multigrade classroom "...actually works better for kids with special needs." (Greene 1998:4). Hines (1998:23) related the case of the special needs girl, whose classmates from her multiage class five years ago, although they have moved to higher grades over the years, still take her out during the recess (break times) and play with her. She claimed that this kind of caring and tolerant nature "...is enhanced by having multi-age classes." (Hines 1998:23).

Lawson (1998:9) pointed out that in her class "...there are resources that cover the range of kindergarten to grade 7." This allowed children with special needs or those who needed reinforcement or extension in certain areas, to have access to resources at their own level. In a single grade classroom, they may not have resources that match their level.

Any ostracism based on ability is limited in a multigrade classroom because, as Lawson (1998:9) pointed out,

They are in a class where they are used to a lot of kids or doing a lot of different things. So if they are doing something different it does not automatically become a stigma of 'you are doing little kids work because you cannot do our work.'

(Lawson 1998:9)

An illustration of this point is the case of a six-year-old child with special needs who could not work at the grade level (Taft 1998:12). The multigrade environment allowed him to work at his level with the kindergarten group but to remain in a

classroom of his peer group. Parent Canon (1998:14) observed that the children who are slower will feel neither frustrated nor isolated because they do not have to be 'kept back' in a classroom.

1.3 Role modelling

One of the main advantages cited by many respondents was that the older children are good role models for the younger children (Forester 1998:18; Stone 1998:40; Taft 1998:13,21). One teacher emphasised that in a K/1/2 combination, she never taught the K's,

...the 1's and 2's taught them everything...Really, seriously. They are like little teachers. It is much better for them to learn from each other than from (the teacher)... They learn better and it motivates the (grade) 1 /2. You know they are proud. Even if they are behind, they still know what it is all about.

(Stone 1998:40)

For those older children who are slightly behind, she found that the opportunity to mentor younger peers motivates them and imbues them with a sense of pride and self-worth. According to her, the grade 2's have access to 15 teachers (grade 3's) instead of one (Stone 1998:45).

The First Nations assistance teacher posited that children learn better from their peers than from an adult: "...I find the best learning tool for the children is teaching one another, helping one another." (Stampier 1998:5). She claimed that the children feel more comfortable receiving help from slightly older peers than being told constantly what to do by an adult (Ibid.).

In her survey of the opinions of children in a grade K/1/2 classroom, Chapman (1998:4) found that, not only did the children enjoy being in a mixed age class, but that they preferred being the older children, so that they could play the leadership role

and help the younger children. Interestingly, even the parent who was despondent with multigrade classes, believed that there were advantages for both younger and older children in multigrade teaching. She claimed that there were

...a lot of advantages if the child is in the lower grade (and that) ... the older children get to provide more of a leadership role and they develop...better social skills in dealing with the younger ones...mentorship with their helping and assisting the little ones.

(Bellini 1998:1-2)

1.4 Enhancements to the Teaching and Learning Process

1.4.1 Programme diversity

The principals claimed that multigrade teaching benefited the teaching and learning process in the classroom. For Hines (1998:20), multigrade classrooms allowed for a greater diversity in the programmes in response to the learner diversity in the classroom: “...(it allowed for) a lot more exciting things to happen.” She believed the curriculum alone should not dictate the kind of teaching that happens in a multigrade classroom. The teacher has to take into account the diversity of learner needs and the differing expectations, and implement the curriculum accordingly (Hines 1998:2). Classroom organisation then is in response to the identified needs and expectations of a particular group of children rather than the curriculum itself. She also postulated that in a multiage classroom the teacher was forced to move away from a heavy reliance on the textbook and encouraged to use innovative teaching strategies, such as thematic teaching, co-operative learning and active participation, instead (Ibid:23). One parent observed that in a multigrade classroom, the children discover that “...there are lots of ways of learning.” Dean (1998:4).

1.4.2 Forced to plan

An advantage cited by Forester, is that multigrade teaching almost forces teachers and administrators to plan for integrated instruction. According to him,

...it really makes you take a look at your planning. ...(I)t becomes a model for integrated instruction in the classrooms, it really involves the teachers instructing to a variety of levels rather than regurgitating materials to students of the same level.

(Forester 1998:27)

1.4.3 Continuity

Some teachers believed that it was advantageous to have the same children for a few years because both the teacher and children get to know each other better. Larkin (1998:1) claimed the continuity allowed the teacher to "...know where their strengths and weaknesses are and you can just take those kids from where you left off and keep teaching them. That would be one advantage."

1.4.4 Discipline

A further dimension to this advantage of continuity and coupled to the issue of role modelling, was the lower incidence of disciplinary problems in the multigrade environment (Chapman 1998a:11; Hines 1998:22-23; Lawson 1998:30; Stone 1998:46; Taft 1998:13). At the beginning of the year, the newly enrolled children, including the kindergartners, were able to acclimatize to the new environment within a few weeks instead of a term, which was usually the case in single grade classes (Chapman 1998a:11; Penny 1998:4; Stone 1998:40). Stone believed that:

...it is nice to have the same children because they know what your routines are. My grade 2's from last year are now in grade 3, they knew what I did... you have half your class who knows your expectations, knows your personality, knows what makes you mad... And you get to see those big changes that children go through.

(Stone 1998:42)

From a parent's perspective, being in the same class for more than a year built more stability, a sense of security and confidence in the children (Dean 1998:1-2).

1.5 Children as Indicators of Outcomes and Achievements

Oldman (1998:38) claimed that multigrade classrooms benefited both the older and younger children in terms of understanding clearly their goals and being able to reflect on their achievements. The older children were an indicator of the performance expected of the younger children. In other words, younger children could observe the older children for a clear indication of the desired outcomes for themselves. On the other hand, the older children could observe the younger children to evaluate their progress and celebrate their own achievements. This dual benefit enhanced the children's self-esteem, sense of security and appreciation for one another, regardless of age.

Discussion

There appear to be many advantages to multigrade teaching for both the students and teachers. These advantages impact on both the cognitive and non-cognitive spheres of the child's development. Amongst the cognitive advantages, were role modelling and the opportunity to interact with more and less advanced peers. The non-cognitive advantages were extensive and included the family atmosphere, which led to more caring, sharing and consideration for others. In addition to these advantages, there were benefits for the teaching and learning processes too. These included a diversity of programmes, developmentally appropriate curricula catering to the needs of the children, teachers being forced to plan, integrated curriculum and instruction, continuity and a lower incidence of disciplinary problems.

The findings from my data are echoed in the literature review. Researchers claim that multigrade classrooms increase children's opportunities to develop prosocial

behaviour amidst age and other diversity which in turn enhance cognitive development:

There is also evidence that the quality of young children's competence accurately predicts academic as well as social competence in later grades... The children's acceptance of others is vital to their opportunity to learn the kind of social skills that enhance their future capacity to make positive contributions to their personal and professional communities. It is also an important key to cognitive development.

(Chase and Doan 1994:152)

Multigrade teaching was advantageous particularly in responding to student diversity, for example, children with special needs or differing abilities or cultural diversity.

According to some theorists, multigrade teaching "celebrates diversity":

Today's school children are diverse by family structure and functioning, ethnicity, race, ability and early experiences. It is this complexity...that warrants...educational systems to accommodate students who are reflecting the diversity in society.

(Goodlad and Anderson, as quoted in Bacharach *et al* 1995:4)

Pratt corroborates this view: "...the evidence on multiage grouping appears to confirm the basic principle that diversity enriches and uniformity impoverishes..."

(Pratt, as quoted in Fogarty 1993:52).

According to the some researchers, mixed age grouping "... prevent(s) serious social dysfunction before it has an opportunity to take root." (Chase and Doan 1994:159).

Children who are withdrawn, or who have behaviour problems, may become more prosocial if allowed to provide leadership to younger children (Ibid.). Same-age groups foster playfulness, friendships and aggression while the exposure to younger children elicits greater prosocial behavior including practice in parenting, caretaking and altruism (Ibid.) Prosocial behaviour needs to be practiced to be learned well (Ibid.). The multigrade environment allows for this practice to occur.

In single grade classrooms, it is possible for some children who perform at a mediocre level to continue to do so throughout their school career. This may have the effect of lowering their motivation and self-concept so that as time passes they do not bother to try harder. On the other hand, in a multigrade classroom, a child who is in the lower grade and who is performing at a mediocre level has potential for change the following year when he/she will be amongst the older children and has the responsibility of mentoring the new children in the class. The child's self-esteem and motivation is enhanced through such interaction and in turn, they may reap cognitive benefits, as mentioned earlier (Chase and Doan 1994:153). This opportunity may not exist in single grade classrooms where they are likely to remain with the same group of children from year to year and may continue to perform at the same level. In a study on leadership behaviour among multigrade and single-grade children, it was found that "...eleven-year-olds in the multiage group were more sophisticated and thoughtful in their leadership than their counterparts in single grade class (French *et al*, as quoted in Chase and Doan 1994:159). This is due probably to the opportunities they have to practice leadership and other responsibilities.

Chapman's finding that children prefer mixed age groups is consistent with the study on the indoor and outdoor interaction of 436 neighbourhood children by Ellis *et al* which found that children gathered in same age groups only 6% of the time and in differing groups 55% of the time (Ellis *et al*, as quoted in Chase & Doan 1994:147).

To summarise, the following advantages to multiage teaching expressed by the respondents were echoed in the literature review (Bacharach *et al* 1995:56-58,66; Gomulchuk and Piland 1995:29; Veenman 1995:321):

- younger students emulate the older students while the older students develop greater sense of responsibility;
- lower grade students acquire new concepts more readily while higher grade students have opportunities to review their performance;
- current theories of cognitive development support a mix of students;
- a greater sense of belonging, support, security and confidence;
- enhanced self-concept;
- positive attitudes towards school;
- increased cooperation and prosocial behaviour resulting in fewer disciplinary problems;
- peer tutoring;
- developmentally appropriate curricula catering for the needs of individuals rather than a mass of homogenous students;
- more secure teacher-students relationship due to extended period together;
- individualized instruction in response to a diverse group;
- versatility in utilising a variety of teaching strategies and activities;
- positive relationships between the teachers and parents; and,
- a greater opportunity for the teachers to be innovative.

In conclusion, the literature review seems to support the finding in this study that there are many advantages to multigrade teaching for both the children and teachers.

2. DISADVANTAGES

Whilst the respondents readily identified the advantages of multigrade teaching, they experienced difficulty in identifying disadvantages. The parents, save one, perceived no disadvantages to multigrade teaching.

2.1 Primary and Intermediate Grade Combinations

Forester (1998:26) mentioned that a combination of grades across the primary and intermediate phases, for example, a grade 2/3/4 combination, was a disadvantage. The reason for this is the problem encountered in integrating the curriculum for the two different phases, which correspond with the different stages in child development, namely, the pre-primary and early primary, 5-9 years; and later primary or intermediate, 10-12 years (Padayachie *et al* 1994:26-28). Parent Penny (1998:2) also expressed concern that this kind of combination created extra work for the teacher. However, she did not believe that her child was affected negatively by that kind of combination.

2.2 Increased Workload for Teachers

The disadvantages enunciated by Larkin (1998:2,3,13,40,42), affected the teachers and not the children. According to her, multigrade teaching causes 'burn out' for teachers because of the pressure they encounter in having to combine two curricula. She complained that,

When you have a split class, the pressure of time is overwhelming. There just is not enough time because there is always the unexpected...You never seem to have all the time to get all the concepts taught in the year. So you compound that with a split class.

(Larkin 1998:13)

However, she did not perceive any cognitive or non-cognitive disadvantages for the children in a multigrade classroom (Larkin 1998:40). Chapman's view (1998:3) that teachers prefer single grade teaching to multigrade teaching because they believe that

multigrade teaching involves extra work, was not articulated widely amongst the teachers in my study. This view is supported by other researchers (Craig and McLellan 1987:7; Acheson, as quoted in Brown and Martin 1989:11; Brown and Martin 1989:13) including Veenman (1995:366) who found that: "The teachers generally object to the additional workload and difficulty of catering to the wide range of ages and abilities found in multigrade classrooms." However, Veenman chastises researchers who use such views to advocate avoidance of combination classes since their results "...do not justify such strong claims." (Ibid.). In other words, there are other important considerations and imperatives for multigrade classrooms. These may include the administrative and philosophical basis for multigrade teaching, as well as, the fact that multigrade teaching does not have a negative impact on the cognitive and non-cognitive development of the children (refer to chapter eight).

2.3 A Challenging Programme for Advanced Learners

Researcher and former teacher, Chapman (1998:13,14) claimed that she had not experienced any disadvantages in multigrade teaching. However, she expressed concern that some teachers may not be providing sufficiently challenging activities for the advanced learners in the classroom. Teacher Oldman (1998:39) expressed a similar concern and pointed out: "I really am careful not to allow that to happen in here."

2.4 Parents Concerns and Fears

Principal Hines (1998:23) perceived no disadvantages to multigrade teaching but noted that the biggest challenge that she had to face was "helping parents understand that we are not harming their kids, by putting them with other ages."

Parent Bellini (1998:2,5) felt that the children were doing the same work a lot of the time and that there was no "...evidence of a whole lot of learning taking place." When asked to be more specific about her understanding of learning and what she had expected instead, she responded: "I wish I could be more precise." Her view may be linked to her concern about the lack of standards, textbooks, desks, too much use of group circles and that the classroom was too loose and unstructured. However, she added that this was her concern for the whole of education, not just multigrade classes. She would have preferred that her children received the same brand of education she had received as a child in her multigrade classroom where the curriculum was not integrated. She and her classmates had been divided into separate grades and each grade had its own textbook. It seems that the absence of textbooks made her feel insecure about her role in supporting her child's learning: "It is very hard as a parent to know where your child should be..." (Ibid:5). As noted, the rest of the parents did not perceive any disadvantages to multigrade teaching (Canon 1998:18-19; Hill 1998:1; Dean 1998:2-3). Parent Canon (1998:9,17) attributed the reason for this to the "good" teachers.

2.5 Children from Dysfunctional Families

Lawson (1998:10) conjectured that for siblings who may come from dysfunctional families and who may experience difficulties in getting along, being together in the same environment, 24 hours a day (i.e. at home and at school), may be problematic.

2.6 Teachers may not be Specialised in all Learning Areas

Stone (1998:41) claimed that "...there are pros and cons both..." for multigrade and single grade teaching. She believed that all teachers have an area in which they specialise and that it may result in the children being deprived of a good programme in another area (Ibid). Her own specialist area was language arts and she was

concerned that the children in her class may be deprived in other areas, such as mathematics, for example. For this reason, she wondered if it would not be wise for the child to move on to another classroom the following year (Ibid.).

Discussion

Similar to the findings in the study by Bacharach *et al* (1995:60), the list of advantages that emerged in this study far exceeded the list of disadvantages. These disadvantages included: the combination of grades across the primary and intermediate phases, the increased workload for the teachers, a sufficiently challenging programme for the more advanced learners, parents fears and concerns and children from dysfunctional families being together for extended periods and teachers not being knowledgeable in all learning areas. The concerns about the combination of grades across the primary and intermediate phases warrants careful consideration. It appears that this was the problem experienced by Larkin and may have been responsible for her apparent negative attitude toward multigrade teaching. The integration of the curriculum across the primary grades, K to 3, may be more manageable (*Primary Program* 1990:25; Chapman 1998a:5). Larkin's concern about the lack of time for planning and instruction was expressed by teachers in some studies under review (Gajadharsingh 1991:54; Bacharach *et al* 1995:60; Veenman 1995:324). It is important to note, however, that she perceived no disadvantages in multigrade teaching for the children.

Schools may have to give careful consideration to class combinations which straddle the two phases. The literature review reveals that there is insufficient research about appropriate grade combinations. Gajadharsingh (1991:34) found that the lower grades were best suited for combination classes. On the other hand,

Veenman (1995:372) found that some researchers recommend lower grades while others "...recommend only grade 3/4 and grade 4/5 combinations...or the higher grades". Veenman also stated that research on suitable and effective grade combinations was "greatly needed" (Ibid.). Further research about suitable grade combinations may be necessary to help schools plan for multigrade classes in a more structured way and based on sound pedagogical considerations.

A possible disadvantage, though not experienced by any of the respondents in this study, was the concern expressed by Chapman and Oldman that some teachers may not provide a challenging program for the more advanced learners. According to Chapman (1998:13-14) and Oldman (1998:39), it is possible to avoid this problem if the teachers are aware of the problem and ensure that they provide a diverse and stimulating programme, catering for the needs and interests of all the children in the classroom, as they had done in their own classrooms.

The problem raised by Stone that the children may receive an unbalanced programme based on the teacher's own interest and specialist areas, could arise in a single grade teaching context as well where the teachers for two or more consecutive grades may have similar areas of expertise. It is uncertain whether there is any effort in single grade schools to ensure that children move from a specialist language teacher in one grade to a specialist maths teacher in the next grade and so on. Primary teachers usually are expected to have a broad base of education which allows them to provide instruction in all the learning areas (subjects). This problem may be avoided also if teachers are conscious of the problem. A professional and committed teacher is responsible for designing a program in response to the children's holistic needs within

the parameters of the curriculum, the specified outcomes and benchmarks. This should help her to develop a diverse programme that covers all the learning areas and not just her own interest area.

The concerns highlighted by Bellini earlier may appear valid but they pertain not to multigrade teaching *per se*, but to the whole education system and question the very tenets on which teaching practice in British Columbia is based currently. These include:

- a child-centred approach instead of a teacher directed or textbook based approach;
- the integration of the curriculum and grades for instruction instead of a graded curriculum and the segregation of grades for instruction;
- continuous assessment instead of standardised testing;
- various grouping techniques, including small groups and peer groups instead of whole class instruction and self-directed work alone; and,
- movable tables and chairs instead of desks.

Textbooks, desks, and standardised tests are remnants of the past education system, probably in existence during Bellini's childhood. It seems as if she would prefer her children to receive the same kind of education she had received, probably because, according to her beliefs, it 'worked' whilst the current one does not. Current theories on how children grow and develop point to the importance of social interaction for cognitive and non-cognitive development and have been the basis for the changes in teaching approach and the curriculum. It seems unlikely that they may be reversed in Canada in the near future, or that it is desirable to do so.

The respondents and the researchers in the literature review were of the view that some of the disadvantages and negative attitudes may be dispelled through making information about multigrade teaching more readily available to the parents and the teachers (Hines 1998:3-4; Forester and Reinhard 1989:207; Gajadharsingh 1991:2; Bacharach et al 1995:60-1; Veenman 1995:323).

CHAPTER TEN

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL MULTIGRADE TEACHING

In addition to soliciting the respondents' views on the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade teaching, the respondents were requested to proffer their opinions on what constituted the key to successful multigrade teaching. It was hoped that this data would provide information on the key factors necessary for good multigrade teaching.

1. THE TEACHER

Almost all the respondents' opinions centred on the teacher. The statement of one parent, simply and succinctly put, probably encapsulates what constitutes a good multigrade classroom: "I think the teacher is the biggest thing." (Canon 1998:17). A teacher concurred with this view:

It is who is in front of that classroom that is going to make a difference...I mean they can be in there with just chalk and slate, and they will get across with those kids, using the resources that they have...I really do believe that who is in front of the class, (is important).

Larkin (1998:40)

1.1 Good Organisation and Planning

Many believed that it was critical for the teacher to be organised and to plan well (Dean 1998:8; Forester 1998:18; Larkin 1998:42; Stone 1998:7; Taft 1998:20; Wren 1998:7). Parent Canon (1998:9,17) claimed that the teacher has to be organised, approachable and know how to teach two classes.

1.2 Clearly Defined Routines and Expectations

Taft (1998:20) emphasised that the teacher must have a routine with clearly spelt out expectations that were communicated to the children. During the observation, it became apparent that the teachers remind the children frequently of their expectations both in general and with respect to specific tasks.

1.3 A Good Knowledge of the Children's Needs, the Curriculum and Instructional Strategies

A good knowledge of the child's developmental needs, the curriculum and the use of cooperative and integrative teaching and learning strategies were also rated as important factors for successful multigrade teaching (Dean 1998:8,9; Forester 1998:18; Larkin 1998:5,12; Lawson 1998:6; Penny 1998:7-9). Parent Penny (1998:8) stressed that "...the most important factor is knowing exactly where the child's needs are." According to Larkin (1998:5), the teacher "...must know the curriculum inside out, upside down and ...the grade level expectations..." Parent Dean (1998:9) pointed out that if the teacher understands the needs of the child, she will be able to create a "firm" classroom with a sense of family. This means "...letting go of the teacher's part of power... a big change from 'I am the boss teacher and you have to do what I say.' We worked together to develop rules for the classroom and they did, they developed their own rules... guidelines." (Larkin 1998:5).

1.4 Peer Tutoring as an Effective Strategy

Peer tutoring appeared to be an effective strategy for managing the multigrade classroom effectively. While some children tutored others the teacher could engage in planning, assessment, small group or individualised instruction.

1.5 Positive Attitudes

Hines (1998:2), who indicated that she had experienced multigrade and multiage teaching as both a teacher and a principal, posited that “a great deal” depends on the teacher’s attitude. This view is supported by Taft (1998:21): “If you have a positive attitude it can really work out well.” The positive attitude of most teachers in my study may be related to two things: 1) their years of experience and, 2) their adoption of multiage rather than multigrade teaching in their classroom.

Larkin’s negative attitude in comparison to the positive attitude of the other teachers may be attributed also to the amount of experience she had in multigrade teaching. She had only 2 years of experience in comparison to Lawson, Oldman, Stone and Taft, who each had 20, 10, 7 and 5 years of experience, respectively. There may be a correlation between experience and attitude.

Through a multiage approach, the teachers had focussed on the needs of the individual children by integrating the grades and the curriculum, rather than segregating the grades for teaching. My finding that this approach may have contributed to their positive attitude is supported by Acheson (as quoted in Gajadharsingh 1991:13): “...teachers have a positive perception of multi-grades when they are implemented from a stated philosophical base rather than from administrative expediency.” This may also explain the apparent contradiction between Larkin’s attitude and her classroom practice. She was able to put aside her negative attitudes and run a successful programme by integrating the grades and focussing on the needs of individual children. As noted previously, her problem was exacerbated probably by the combination of primary and intermediate grades in her classroom.

1.6 Good Qualities

The respondents identified the following teacher qualities as a key to multigrade teaching: flexibility, commitment, dedication, being approachable and having a relaxed, calm and patient demeanour (Canon 1998:9; Dean 1998:9; Forester 1998:28; Greene 1998:8; Lawson 1998:25; Wren 1998:6). A principal stated that professionalism is important, even if the teacher

...is not totally dedicated to (multigrade teaching that she) ...is professional enough to know that it is important to get on with the job of instructing children...it is a commitment to the ethic of care. You care about children, you care about who they are, care about how you instruct them...

(Forester 1998:28)

2. TEACHER EDUCATION AND A SUPPORTIVE PRINCIPAL

A broad-based teacher education together with being multi-skilled and understanding the concept of multiple-intelligences were considered important factors (Larkin 1998:5; Lawson 1998:6; Oldman 1998:4). Lawson (1998:6-7), who undertook the daunting task of teaching seven grades in one classroom, advised that the teacher needed to be self-motivated in order to accomplish her mission without much support and guidance from the education authorities. Oldman (1998:12) pointed out that a supportive principal was also an essential factor.

3. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A parent and some teachers believed that the key to successful multigrade teaching was the involvement of parents in the school (Hill 1998:3; Larkin 1998:6; Lawson 1998:7; Oldman 1998:10,12). Lawson (1998:7) explained, "So if you cannot... establish a relationship with parents and maintain it, you are not going to get anywhere."

Discussion

The key to a successful multigrade classroom, as perceived by the respondents in this study, is without a doubt the teacher. Important skills included the ability to plan and organise well. This was affirmed in the literature review. A study of multigrade teachers in British Columbia, Canada "...indicated that the most important factor to successful multigrade instruction was the teacher's ability to plan and organize."

(Bandy, as quoted in Miller 1991:2). Another researcher, found that

...success depends on the ability of the teacher to organize and manage instruction so that cooperation, independence and a motivation to learn become environmental norms...

(Dordendorf, as quoted in Miller 1991:5)

Other attributes of the teachers included a sound knowledge of the curriculum and the developmental needs of the child and qualities such as flexibility, commitment, dedication, self-motivation, being multi-skilled, approachable, relaxed, calm and patient. The teacher was instrumental also in ensuring the support and involvement of the parents in the classroom, which in turn was essential for successful multigrade teaching (Forester and Reinhard 1989:238; Dean 1998:7; Hines 1998:3-4; Oldman 1998:7,8,10,12).

These findings in this study are consistent with that of other researchers (Forester and Reinhard 1989:207; Bandy, as quoted in Miller 1991:2; Gajadharsingh 1991:2,56; Miller 1991:7-8; Bacharach *et al* 1995:60-1; Veenman 1995:370-5; McKernan 1996;11). Bacharach *et al* concluded:

As with any innovation, the individual teacher is the key to success. It takes a knowledgeable, caring and committed teacher to successfully implement multiage grouping.

Bacharach *et al* (1995:66)

In addition, the teachers in Bacharach *et al*'s study advised that success called for planning, positive attitudes, flexibility, parental involvement and the teacher letting go of control, all of which substantiate the views of the respondents in my study.

Given that the respondents in this study and the experts in multigrade teaching agree that the key to successful multigrade teaching is the individual teacher, it would seem that serious attention ought to be given to teacher education and support.

CHAPTER ELEVEN
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
FURTHER RESEARCH

1. CONCLUSIONS

Through the exploration of multigrade teaching in a foreign context, it became evident that there may not be a 'best way' for children to learn and develop and that what may be considered feasible ('best way') in one country may not be necessarily appropriate or successful in another. It is in the light of this that these conclusions and their implications for South Africa are made.

The empirical evidence suggests that multigrade teaching is common practice in British Columbia, Canada. The curriculum policy itself, notwithstanding changes over the decade, has been supportive of 'non-graded organization' for primary classes (*Primary Program* 1990:24).

Despite the widespread occurrence and the policy recommendations for non-graded organization since 1990, multigrade teaching in British Columbia continues to experience the following problems:

- little or no official recognition of multigrade teaching by government; teacher education and research institutions and teacher associations;
- a lack of professional and financial support for multigrade teaching;
- the lack of pre- and in-service training on multigrade teaching; and
- very little research in this area.

These problems were indicated by:

- a confusion about terminology and a disjuncture between the terms used and the kind of practice evident in the classroom;
- little official guidance for implementing multigrade teaching in the classroom;
- no specific professional support from the Ministry despite a well-resourced district and school based support system for other aspects of education (e.g. special needs, First Nations support and learning assistance); and
- no organised lobbying for attention to multigrade teaching from teacher associations/unions.

It appears that the *Primary Program* has not changed the status of multigrade teaching significantly because:

- multigrade teaching is regarded still as a temporary phenomenon;
- multigrade teaching is seen as one of the many 'problems' facing education and as a result, has not been accorded any special attention by the Ministry;
- political issues have forced Government to focus on other areas;
- schools believe the authorities need to take the responsibility for improving multigrade teaching, while the authorities believe that the responsibility lies with the districts and the schools (Hines 1998:18-19; Ministry officials 1998:18-20 field notes – annexure D);
- the resource materials to support the implementation of the curriculum, the IRPs, were developed by subject specialists who appear not to have liaised with one another. This has led to a lack of integration and the reappearance of a graded approach to the curriculum;
- teachers and teacher associations do not appear to have given much consideration to this problem;
- teacher education institutions appear to have ignored the policy and the reality of multigrade schools, both in their coursework and in the way they assign students to practicūms in single grade classrooms; and
- researchers appear to have largely ignored the possible impact that this policy could have had in promoting multigrade teaching. There is little evidence of

any studies that examine the prevalence of multigrade teaching in British Columbia or the effect of the *Primary Program* on multigrade teaching.

Notwithstanding these problems, the Canadian teachers in this study appeared to have managed multigrade teaching successfully. This success was indicated by:

- the interested and engaged learners;
- the effective use of instructional time through various instructional strategies;
- the teachers' commitment and dedication to teaching indicated for example, by their after-hours presence in the classroom and the time they devote during vacations and weekends to planning; and
- parents with positive attitudes towards multigrade teaching.

The Canadian respondents believed that the key to successful multigrade teaching was the teacher (Canon 1998:17; Larkin 1998:5,40,42). The success of these teachers was attributed to the following:

- An ability to organise, plan and utilise time effectively;
- A good understanding of the needs and interests of the children;
- A good knowledge of the curriculum, especially the integration of the curriculum for teaching both across the grades and the learning areas;
- A positive attitude towards multigrade teaching;
- Qualities such as flexibility, innovation, commitment and dedication;
- Experience gained in multigrade teaching; and
- An ability to communicate with parents and involve them in the school.

The reason for their success in teaching multigrade classes, despite the problems they encounter such as no multigrade teacher education, may lie in the kind of teacher education Canadian teachers received and the degree to which they have understood and internalised the curriculum policy, in particular the child-centred approach.

1.1 Teacher Education

As noted in chapter three, section 3.4.1, teacher education in Canada does not prepare teachers specifically for multigrade teaching. The teachers, however, received preparation for teaching approaches that are child-centred, participatory, activity based, flexible and open-ended, encouraging an understanding of multiple-intelligences and the utilization of a range of instructional strategies. Only one of the teachers in my study had served her practicum in a multigrade classroom thereby receiving the opportunity to observe and learn from more experienced multigrade teachers, the apprenticeship model. This experience has had a significant impact on the quality of teaching in her classroom and may imply that teacher education institutions need to make a concerted effort to ensure that teachers serve at least a part of their practicum in multigrade environments.

The teachers had to use their own initiative to transfer and adapt their training for application in the multigrade classroom. Their apparent success may be the result of the critical thinking skills and the sense of professionalism they develop during their training (McKernan 1996:47). This has enabled these teachers to cope with the problems they encounter in multigrade teaching and still deliver a professional programme for the children. In turn, they have adopted these critical thinking approaches in their own classrooms.

Their professionalism was further indicated by:

- the attention paid to proper and regular planning;
- after hours spent at school;
- the careful attention given to the organisation and management of their classrooms and the curriculum programme;

- a zealous commitment demonstrated by using their own resources to acquire materials for the classroom; and
- constantly researching new ways of promoting teaching and learning in the classroom. McKernan (1996:35) emphasises that “Teacher research must be seen to count as a significant part of behaving in a professional way.”

While it is recommended that teacher education institutions focus on multigrade teaching, the Canadian experience seems to indicate that it is possible to equip teachers with universal knowledge, skills and values that may be applicable to any teaching situation, including multigrade teaching. It is essential that this form of teacher education builds critical thinking skills, flexibility and open-ended, child-centred and activity-based approaches and the utilization of effective instructional strategies.

The following suggestions about the content of teacher education courses were made by some of the respondents:

- planning and organising the classroom and curriculum for two or more grades;
- appropriate instructional strategies for multigrade teaching such as effective grouping, cooperative learning, peer tutoring and self directed activities;
- appropriate resources and materials so that children may engage in stimulating and meaningful self-directed activities;
- skills in classroom management and the maintenance of discipline;
- knowledge and techniques for appropriate grade/age combinations;
- preparation for classroom action research to improve practice; and
- effective communication and interpersonal skills for dealing with all age groups, team teaching, and for involving parents and securing their support for this form of teaching.

A respondent emphasised that teacher education should incorporate the transfer of teaching techniques that teachers ought to use in the classroom (Chapman 1998a: 20-21). It is necessary to recognise that the teacher educator's style and "way of being" influence student teachers (Ibid.). According to McKernan,

A professional thinks by reason of what he or she is, rather than existing by virtue of what he or she thinks. Learning how to develop curriculum units does not depend upon instruction gained during teacher training, but upon modes of behaviour and are supported by an ethos complementary and sustaining to such professionalism.

(McKernan 1996:48).

Accordingly, "To behave professionally one must reveal some essence of one's self or character. It is not the 'knowing that' but the 'knowing how' variety." (Ibid.) Thus, the emphasis should be on the processes of teaching and learning, not on the content. This may be achieved through experiential and practice based inquiry methods of training.

For teacher education to be effective, attention needs to be devoted to the transfer of training (Veenman and Raemakers 1995:169). This means that the knowledge, skills and values acquired during the teacher education be applied effectively in the workplace and that the level of skills increases with practice over time (Ibid.). This may have valuable implications for the quality of teacher education and support which South African teachers, including multigrade teachers, may need in the future. Relevant support or coaching may facilitate the transfer of teacher education in a sustainable way.

1.2 The Policy of a Child-Centred Approach

It is my view that the teachers' success in multigrade teaching was due largely to the degree to which they have understood and internalised the curriculum policy. The recognition of the uniqueness of each child, a child-centred approach, is a basic tenet

of the curriculum policy. For the Canadian teachers, child-centredness appeared to be a norm of the society in which they find themselves. This approach was consonant with their very way of being.

Every facet of the teaching and learning process revealed that the teacher had internalised the curriculum policy guidelines:

- Although multigrade teaching in schools 1, 2 and 4 had originated in response to administrative imperatives, the teachers applied a pedagogical approach of catering to the needs of the individual children, which was more characteristic of multiage teaching.
- The teachers implemented the curriculum according to the philosophical underpinnings and not simply according to technical procedures.
- Even though Larkin was not in favour of multigrade teaching, she ran a successful programme because she adopted the child-centred approach by focussing on individual children and integrated cooperative groups.
- The teachers had not received any education or support, yet they conducted themselves professionally because they put their students first.
- Teachers worked after hours to ensure that their programme was meeting the needs and interests of the children.
- For planning purposes, they assess the prior learning of their children and the interests of their learners.
- The students participated in establishing classroom rules and determining areas of interest to focus on in the learning programme. This indicated the teachers' respect for the children.
- The classroom was arranged in a flexible manner to allow for free movement and interaction amongst the children.
- Children were involved in the assessment process. They maintained their own log books, portfolios and participated in three-way conferences.
- A variety of strategies was used that enabled students to be active participants in the learning process. Children were afforded the opportunity to tutor others.

- Parents were encouraged to become involved in their children's learning. This demonstrated the teacher's understanding of the important role parents play in education and in the integration of home and school experiences of the children.
- All the teachers believed that there were greater advantages for children in a multigrade classroom, including Larkin despite her complaint that it increased the workload for the teachers.

It is my belief that a good understanding of the principles of the curriculum enabled teachers to implement multigrade teaching successfully, despite their having received no preparation or support.

2. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

A conclusion of the findings of multigrade teaching in Canada may offer some implications for multigrade teaching in South Africa. Multigrade teaching in South Africa, encounters problems not unlike those experienced in Canada:

- no official recognition of multigrade teaching;
- a lack of academic and financial support for multigrade teaching;
- the lack of pre- and in-service training on multigrade teaching; and
- very little research in this area.

In addition, the South African education system is characterised further by:

- large numbers of inadequately trained teachers, as a result of decades of apartheid education, and
- a general lack of adequate resources and funding for schools.

The new South African curriculum, *Curriculum 2005*, has the following principles in common with the Canadian curriculum:

- Outcomes based
- A learner-centred approach
- Continuous Assessment

- Developing critical thinking and problem solving skills
- Integration
- Relevance
- Inclusion of all students, irrespective of ability, race, culture, creed, and gender
- Flexibility

This new transformational curriculum represents a complete paradigm shift from the previous education system. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, the teachers, many of whom are the products of apartheid education and who already may lack competence in teaching and learning, have not been adequately prepared for the new outcomes-based education curriculum. For many, their preparation has consisted of a one-week training programme, and a three-month pilot phase prior to full-scale implementation. This means that the teachers may not have had the opportunity to internalise either the policy or the strategies to implement the new curriculum.

Materials and resources have been inadequate due to financial constraints. In addition, some of the materials have been written by people who themselves do not understand the philosophical and theoretical assumptions of *Curriculum '2005*. Hence, the materials may not be coherent and consistent with the curriculum itself. This has caused confusion amongst teachers who already have been inundated with a great amount of new information in a short space of time.

In *Curriculum 2005*, the assessment criteria and range statements for general education (grades 1 to 9) are pegged at the end of the phases, at grade 3 for the foundation phase, at grade 6 for the intermediate phase and at grade 9 for the senior phase. This may make it possible to encourage multigrade teaching within phases.

However, the curriculum and supporting policy statements make no mention of multigrade teaching. Yet, more than half of the schools in South Africa have some form of multigrade teaching. This figure may be higher in the Eastern Cape, where there is a high proportion of rural and farm schools.

Many teachers in multigrade and single grade classrooms in South Africa have encountered the following problems in implementing the new curriculum¹¹:

- A lack of understanding the basic tenets of the curriculum policy and their implementation;
- Ineffective classroom management and organisation;
- An ineffective use of instructional time in the classroom;
- Confusion in utilising resources, e.g. learning programme grids for planning lesson units;
- A lack of knowledge about curriculum management and effective instructional strategies, such as grouping; and
- Difficulties in integrating the curriculum for both multigrade teaching and single grade teaching.

The findings from the Canadian study may have implications for improving teaching and learning effectiveness in South Africa, given the similar curriculum policy initiatives and problems encountered in multigrade teaching. Furthermore, the strategies to bring about effective multigrade teaching may be applicable to all forms of teaching. For example, the child-centred approaches, integration of the curriculum and a variety of grouping techniques which are essential for catering for the diversity of ages in the Canadian multigrade classrooms, may be equally effective in single

¹¹ This evidence is the result of group interviews I have conducted to evaluate the implementation of *Curriculum 2005* amongst some teachers in the Eastern Cape, in preparation for writing guidelines for the implementation of *Curriculum 2005* for the Department of Education, Eastern Cape.

grade classrooms where there is a range of abilities and interests, even among same age children.

For South Africa, this means an abandonment of teacher-directed, textbook based learning with parrot fashion and rote learning techniques in favour of child-centred, activity-based learning with learner participation and appropriate grouping techniques. The study offers the following implications for improving teaching and learning effectiveness in multigrade and single grade classrooms in South Africa.

2.1 *“The teacher is the biggest thing”*

The education system and teachers themselves need to recognise that the teacher is the main resource. This does not imply that additional teachers have to be appointed but rather that the government should invest in improving the existing teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes to manage teaching and learning more effectively.

2.2 *Teach teachers the way you want them to teach*

Teacher education methodologies should include adult education techniques that are learner centred, encourage critical and reflective thinking, experiential, participatory and activity-based. This may encourage teachers to understand and adopt learner centred approaches in their classrooms.

2.3 *Policy for all (PFA)*

Currently in South Africa, there are many donor-funded intervention programmes to assist the implementation of the new policies. These programmes as well as formal teacher education programmes ought to familiarise teachers and education support staff with the philosophy and principles underlying the new policies. Teachers need

to understand why they should change their practice (Walsh 1993) before they are introduced to in-service education on materials and instructional strategies, as has been the practice with the introduction of *Curriculum 2005*.

If teachers understand and appreciate the concepts of and rationale for child-centred, participatory and activity-based approaches, they will be able to use any kind of materials or strategies in the desired way. If not, no amount of sound policy, programmes or materials will be implemented in the intended manner.

In addition, those responsible for in-service education may not have understood the policy themselves. If this is the case, they too should be the recipients of teacher education programmes.

2.4 *Policy cannot be imposed; it must match the socio-economic system*

The child-centred, activity based approach to learning is based on Western theories of education and child development (Dewey 1938; Barrow 1976; Vygotsky 1978; Bieler 1981; Piaget 1968 in Wadsworth 1989;). The intention of *Curriculum 2005* to implement child-oriented, activity-based approaches for the Foundation Phase is laudable. South Africa, however, has emerged only recently from a rigid, authoritarian political and education system. Our society remains largely traditional. Hence, it has not been the norm for many teachers, especially those working with largely illiterate parents in rural areas, as in the case of multigrade teaching, to consider themselves accountable to either the children or the parents. A child-centred approach implies respect for the child, basing the programme on the needs and interests of the child and the child's right to question things. The question arises: how relevant and successful can this approach be within the context of traditional societies

in the developing world? Perhaps it is necessary to identify exactly what is intended through such approaches and whether they are not achieved better through alternative means in different societies. Further research is needed on the appropriateness of Western theories of child development and its application in developing countries.

2.5 *Support means support*

Formerly the subject advisors and more recently the Education Development Officers constitute a support system for the teachers. They could and should play a more meaningful support role in the implementation of the well-intended policies. Unfortunately, many of them have not received adequate training on the new curriculum and therefore do not understand the curriculum and new policy initiatives to be able to provide the required support for the teachers. The subject advisors are usually secondary school teachers, specialising in subjects. Therefore they have little knowledge of primary education, let alone multigrade teaching. In some instances, the Education Development Officers' lack of understanding hampers rather than supports the teacher because their advice contradicts what the teacher may have learned through various intervention programmes.

An additional form of support that may be considered is that of multigrade teachers forming peer groups to share experiences and solve common problems.

2.6 *There is no substitute for good planning*

Time invested in regular and methodical planning is time saved and usually results in a well-managed classroom. Teachers need to assume full responsibility for planning and organising their classroom, programme and activities. If the programme is

interesting to the teacher, her enthusiasm will invoke the interest of the children and instructional time may be used more effectively.

2.7 *Variety is the spice of life*

There is no one 'best way' in a multigrade classroom, or any classroom for that matter. A variety of instructional strategies may be employed in the multigrade classroom. These include thematic teaching, cooperative learning, various grouping techniques, peer tutoring, self-directed learning and individualised learning. Canadian teachers found that the utilization of various grouping techniques, commencing with whole class instruction followed by small groups, peer tutoring or self-directed learning, to be most effective. This afforded the teacher the opportunity to instruct individual children.

2.8 *Multigrade means better pupil:teacher ratios*

Peer tutoring is an effective strategy in multigrade classrooms and may be especially useful in large classrooms. In a multigrade classroom, there are potentially many mentors in addition to the teacher (Chase and Doan 1994:150). One Canadian teacher (Stone 1998:46) claimed that there were 15 teachers in her class of 25, namely, the older children in the higher grade. In a study in the literature review, a teacher claimed that she had a ratio of 25:25 rather than 25:1, implying 25 learners and 25 teachers (Chapman 1995:421).

2.9 *Materials are an aid, not a substitute for good teaching*

It cannot be denied that materials are important for enhancing the quality of effective teaching and learning. Materials, however, are not an end in themselves but a means to achieving effective teaching and learning and they should be consistent with the

principles of the policy framework. There appears to have been a preoccupation with materials in the implementation of *Curriculum 2005*.

This heavy reliance on materials has not been balanced with adequate training on the policy, curriculum and instructional strategies. On the contrary, the authorities' emphasis on materials has had the effect of further disempowering teachers, making them internalise the mistaken belief that all problems of implementation would dissipate if more materials were available. The teacher should be assisted to link the materials with the philosophy of how children learn most effectively. Moreover, intervention programmes should encourage teachers to view themselves as a major resource and to take the initiative to be innovative by developing their own materials from natural and waste resources.

2.10 “*Teachers must know the curriculum inside out and upside down*”

Teachers need to know more about the curriculum than how to manipulate the learning programme grids (see glossary). This has sometimes become a mechanical and technical exercise that may not necessarily result in an effective teaching and learning programme. These grids, have often consumed much of the teachers' time as they strive to comply with suggestions and pressure from the authorities. In most instances, it has resulted in teachers using the grids and phase or programme organisers rather than the needs and interests of the children as a starting point for their planning. In addition, through their focus on the grids, teachers run the risk of 'teaching' the outcomes rather than guiding the students through a learning process that will enable them to arrive at the outcomes as the end point.

Thematic teaching may be used as a vehicle for integrating the curriculum which should aim to build on the prior knowledge of the children and be based on their needs and interests. An example of this is the "Know-wonder" (see glossary) web used for planning themes in Canada.

The curriculum should not dictate the kind of teaching and learning that happens in the classroom. Instead, the teacher has to take into account the diversity of learner needs and the differing expectations, and implement the curriculum accordingly.

3. CONCLUSION: *Multigrade teaching - not merely an alternative but a good alternative at that.*

Multigrade classrooms can cater for a diversity of students. Single grade classrooms, with their grade specific curriculum, usually do not provide for such diversity (Oldman 1998:31-32). The multigrade classroom was found to be beneficial also for culturally diverse groups, for example, the older First Nations children. This feature may be especially useful in South Africa where schools are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of race and culture.

A child-centred, flexible approach need not imply a lack of discipline. One of the benefits of multigrade grouping is that the older children may set an example for the younger children to emulate them. South African teachers, especially those with large classes may utilise this system to their own benefit. An African study conducted in Togo and Burkina Faso found that multigrade teaching diminished the negative effects of large class size on cognitive development (Jarousse and Mingat, as cited in Veenman 1995:372).

At the very least, multigrade teaching is not harmful to the development of children. Canadian teachers in general believed that multigrade classes were as beneficial to the children cognitively, and in some instances more beneficial than single grade classrooms. In terms of their non-cognitive or psychosocial development, the respondents believed that children in multigrade classrooms fared better than their single grade counterparts. It was found that there were more advantages for the children in multigrade teaching than in single grade teaching. Any disadvantages perceived, pertained mainly to the teacher. The empirical evidence of research studies supports these views (Gajadharsingh 1991; Miller 1991; Veenman 1995).

According to Bacharach *et al* (1995:9-18), the theoretical frameworks of Piaget, Bandura, Vygotsky, Erikson, Bronfenbrenner and Bruner lay the foundation for multigrade teaching. In other words, multigrade teaching is not inconsistent with current theories on child development.

Amongst the cognitive advantages were role modelling and the opportunity to interact with more and less advanced peers which is in keeping with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky:1978). The non-cognitive advantages included the family atmosphere, which led to more caring, sharing and consideration for others. There were benefits for the teaching and learning process too. These included the developmentally appropriate curricula catering to the needs of the students; the individualised instruction in response to the diverse needs; teachers being forced to plan; integrated curriculum and instruction and a diversity of programmes (Gajadharsingh 1991; Miller 1991; Veenman 1995).

In conclusion, multigrade teaching may be considered a viable alternative to single-grade teaching and, instead of viewing it as a temporary phenomenon, it should be viewed as an opportunity for improving school effectiveness.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As mentioned in the introductory section of this thesis, there is a dearth of research in the field of multigrade teaching both nationally and internationally. This study has afforded me the opportunity to develop a better understanding of multigrade teaching in the Canadian context. In a follow up to this study, I hope to compare the findings from this study with that from my study conducted in India for a comparison of both the developing and developed world contexts and to work with multigrade teachers in South Africa to develop a teacher educators guide for teaching multigrade classes in the context of *Curriculum 2005*.

There are areas of multigrade teaching in both Canada and South Africa that may require further research. My recommendations in this regard are listed hereunder.

4.1 Canada

- a) More accurate and current data is required on the prevalence of multigrade and multiage classrooms in British Columbia.
- b) An examination of educators' use of terminology and whether these match their actual classroom practice.
- c) Research is required on appropriate grade combinations within the primary and intermediate divisions of schooling to enable educators to combine classes more effectively, especially across the primary/intermediate phases.

- d) A study of the impact of the *Primary Program* on multigrade teaching in British Columbia may be useful and may have wider implications for multigrade teaching throughout Canada.
- e) For teachers, research on how to integrate the curriculum for instruction across the grades may be useful, as indicated in this study.
- f) Research on peer tutoring in multigrade classrooms and their effect on multigrade teaching may assist teachers to use this strategy more effectively.

4.2 South Africa

- a) Research on the prevalence of multigrade teaching provincially and nationally is needed. This data may be useful for persuading authorities of the importance to develop policy and guidelines for multigrade teaching in South Africa.
- b) The feasibility of implementing multigrade teaching within *Curriculum 2005* may be an interesting area of further study.
- c) Research on the inclusion of multigrade/multiage teaching strategies in both pre- and in-service teacher education programmes.
- d) Research on assessment methods, in particular, observation in large multigrade classrooms, may be useful for teachers who currently experience this problem.
- e) Policy and guidelines on multigrade teaching and learning may be useful.

An interesting area of further research may be an examination of the appropriateness of the application of Western theories of child development and child-centred approaches in traditional societies in the developing world.

REFERENCES

- Anitha, B.K.** (1996). *Interaction of village characteristics and schools in terms of quality and utilisation : a study of villages in the Tumkur District*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Bangalore University, Bangalore, India.
- Ault, R.L.** (1977). *Children's cognitive development : Piaget's theory and the process approach*. New York : Oxford University Press.
- Bacharach, N., Hasslen, R. C., & Anderson, J.** (1995). *Learning together: a manual for multiage grouping*. California : Corwin Press Inc.
- Banister, P., Burman, E., Parker, I., Talor, M. & Tindall, C.** (1994). *Qualitative methods in psychology; a research guide*. Buckingham : Open University Press.
- Barker, B.O.** (1986). Efforts to improve the preparation of teachers for rural schools. Annual conference of the Southwest Educational Research Association. Texas : Texas Technical University.
- Baron, J.B. & Sternberg, R.J.** (1986). (Eds.). *Teaching thinking skills: theory and practice*. New York : Freeman and Co.
- Barrow, R.** (1976). *Commonsense and the curriculum*. London : George Allan & Unwin.
- Bieler, R.** (1981). *Child development: an introduction*. (2nd ed.). Boston : Houghton Mifflin.
- British Columbia** (Province). Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights. (1990). *Primary Program Foundation Document*. British Columbia : Government Printer.
- British Columbia** (Province). Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights. (1992). *Supporting Learning. Understanding and assessing the progress of children in the Primary Program*. British Columbia : Government Printer.
- British Columbia** (Province). Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights. (1998). *Memorandum of agreement with British Columbia Teachers' Federation: K-3 primary class size*. British Columbia : Government Printer.
- Brown, M. & Martin, A.B.** (1989). Student achievement in multigrade and single grade classes. *Education Canada*, 10-13,47.
- Bruner, J.S.** (1966). *Studies in cognitive growth*. New York : Wiley.
- Byrnes, D.A., Shuster, T. & Jones, M.** (1994). Parent and student views of multiage classrooms. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 9(1), 15-23.

Cantrell, D. (1993). Alternative paradigms in environmental education research : the interpretive perspective. In R. Mrazek (Ed.), *Alternative paradigms in environmental education research* (pp.81-104). Troy, Ohio : NAAEE.

Chapman, M.L. (1995). Designing literacy learning experiences in a multiage classroom. *Language Arts*, 72 (6), 416-428.

Chase, P. & Doan, J. (1994). *Full circle. A new look at multiage education*. Portsmouth : Heineman.

Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (1989). *Research methods in education*. (3rd ed.). London : Routledge.

Collins, V. (1998, 23 November). Personal Communication.

Connole, H. (1998). The research enterprise. *Research Methodologies in Education. Study Guide*. 7-27. Deakin University.

Craig, C. & McLellan, J. (1987). Split grade classrooms : an educational dilemma. *Education Canada*, 29 (4), 4-9.

Dave, R.H., Ranaweera, A.M. & Sutton, P.J. (1990). *Meeting the basic learning needs of out of school children : non-formal approaches*. Hamburg : UNESCO.

Day, B. & Hunt, G.H. (1975). Multiage classrooms : an analysis of verbal communication. *The Elementary School Journal*, 75 (7), 458-464.

Dever, M.T., Zila, R. & Manzamo, N.N. (1994). Multiage classrooms : a new way to learn math. *Principal*, 73 (4), 22-23,26.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York : Macmillan.

Edusource News Data (1994, June). Johannesburg: Education Foundation Trust.

Feinberg, W. & Soltis, J.F. (1992). *School and society* (2nd ed.). New York : Teachers College Press.

Fogarty, R. (Ed.). (1993). *The multiage classroom: a collection*. Palantine : IRI/Skylight.

Forester, A. D. & Reinhard, M. (1989). *The learners' way*. Winnipeg : Peguis.

Gajadharsingh, J. Canadian education association research study. In Gayfer, M. (Ed.). (1991). *The multigrade classroom: myth and reality. A Canadian study*. Toronto : Canadian Education Association.

Gomulchuk, S.L. & Piland, W.E. (1995). Teacher attitudes toward multi-age classes. *Education Canada*, 35 (3), 28-32.

- Goyal, B.R.** (1990). *Handbook for teachers on multigrade teaching*. New Delhi : NCERT.
- Goyal, B.R.** (1992). *Multigrade teaching (inservice education package for elementary teacher educators)*. New Delhi : NCERT.
- Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S.** (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, California : Sage.
- Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S.** (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, California : Sage.
- Gupta, D., Jain, M. & Bala, N.** (1996). *Multi-grade teaching - status and implications*. New Delhi : NCERT.
- Gupta, D.** (1997). *Rishi valley satellite schools - an experiment in multigrade teaching*. Unpublished study report. New Delhi : NCERT.
- Hovda, R.A., Kyle, D.W. & McIntyre, E.** (Ed.) (1996). *Creating nongraded k-3 classrooms. teachers' stories and lessons learned*. California : Corwin Press.
- India.** Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Education). (1986). *National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986*. New Delhi : Government of India.
- India.** Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Education). (1991). *Minimum levels of learning at primary stage: report of committee set up by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education, under the Chairmanship of Professor R.H. Dave*. New Delhi : NCERT.
- Irwin, P.** (1999). (Research methodology course). Lecture notes, Education Department, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Jain, M.** (1997). *Initiatives in multilevel teaching at primary stage: two case studies*. New Delhi : NCERT.
- Janse van Rensburg, E.** (1999). (Research methodology course). Lecture notes, Education Department, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R., Pierson, W.T. & Lyons, V.** (1985). Controversy versus concurrence seeking in multi-grade and single-grade learning groups. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 22 (9), 835-848.
- Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T.** (1994). *Learning together and alone : cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning* (4th ed.). Massachusetts : Allyn and Bacon.
- Katz, L., Evangelou, D. & Hartman, J.A.** (1990). *The case for mixed-age grouping in early childhood education*. Washington : NAEYC.

- Kerlinger, F.N.** (1986). *Foundations of behavioral research*. New York : Holt, Rinehart & Winston Inc.
- Lather, P.** (1986). Research as praxis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(3), 257-277.
- Leedy, P.** (1965). *Practical research planning and design*. New York : Holt, Rinehart & Winston Inc.
- Little, A.** (1995). *Education research. multi-grade teaching: a review of research and practice*. Occasional Papers on Education, Serial No.12. London : ODA.
- Lodish, R.** (1992). The pros and cons of mixed-age grouping. *Principal*, 71 (5), 20-22.
- Lofland, J. & Lofland, L.** (1995). *Analyzing social settings: a guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. (3rd ed.). Belmont,CA : Wadsworth.
- Mali, M.G.** (1986). *Experiment on continuing education for working children in rural areas*. India : Gargoti.
- McKernan, J.** (1996). *Curriculum action research. a handbook of methods and resources for the reflective practitioner* (2nd ed.). London: Kogan Page Ltd.
- McLoughlin, W.P.** (1967). *The nongraded school. a critical assessment*. New York: The University of the State of New York.
- Merriam, S. B.** (1988). *Case study research in education : a qualitative approach*. San Francisco, California : Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Miller, B.A.** (1990). *A training guide for the multigrade classroom: a resources handbook for small rural schools*. Portland : Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Miller, B. A.** (1991). A review of the qualitative research on multigrade instruction. *In reaching our potential : rural education in the 90's*. Conference proceedings, (pp1-10). Portland : Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Miller, B.** (1995, Spring). Teaching and learning in the multigrade classroom : student performance and instructional routines. *Early Childhood Education, Network Quarterly*, p 4-5. Charleston : Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Mixed-ability teaching in mathematics.** (1977). Schools Council. London : Evans/Methuen Educational.
- Montessori, M.** (1968). *The absorbent mind*. London : Dell.
- Montessori, M.** (1980). *The discovery of the child*. Madras: Kalakshetra
- Montessori, M.** (1988). *The absorbent mind* London : Cleo.

- Mulcahy, D.** (1993). Developing a "distinctive approach" for multigrade classrooms. *Education Canada*, 33 (1), 24-29.
- Multigrade grouping.** (1994). *Occasional Paper Series*, IX (1), 1-15. Andover, M.A. : Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands.
- Murray, S.** (1999). (Research methodology course). Lecture notes, Education Department, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Myers, R.** (1991). *Towards a fair start for children*. New York : UNESCO.
- Nagaraju, C.S.** (1989). National concerns and Indian educational research. *Perspectives in Education*, 5 (4), 195-212.
- Nagaraju, C.S.** (1995). *Intervention for minimum levels of learning through teacher support materials*. Bangalore : Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore University.
- Nagaraju, C.S.** (1997). *Resource support for multigrade teaching : a strategy and action plan*. New Delhi : NCERT.
- National education policy investigation (NEPI): Early Childhood Educare.** (1992). Cape Town : Oxford University Press.
- Padayachie, R., Atmore, E., Biersteker, L., King, R., Matube, J., Muthayan, S., Naidoo, K., Plaatjies, D. & Evans, J.** (1994). *The South African study on early childhood development, report and recommendations*. Johannesburg : CEPD.
- Politano, C. & Davies, A.** (1994). *Multi-age and more*. Winnipeg : Peguis.
- Powney, J. & Watts, M.** (1987). *Interviewing in educational research*. London : Routledge.
- Prather, C.J.** (Ed.). (1993). *Primary Education For All : learning from the BRAC experience, a case study*. Washington, D.C. : ABEL.
- Provincial Education and Training Forum : Primary Commission report.** (1994). East London : PETF.
- Pscharopoulos, G., Rojas, C. & Velez, E.** (1993). Achievement evaluation of Colombia's *Escuela Nueva*: is multigrade the answer? *Comparative Education Review*, 37 (3), 263-276.
- Rossouw, D.** (1994). Geindividualiseerde onderwys: n herevaluering van histories-toonaangewende perspektiewe. *Educare*, 23 (1), 108-118.
- Rothenberg, J.** (1989). The open classroom reconsidered. *The Elementary School Journal*, 90 (1), p69-85.

- Schiefelbein, E.** (1992). *Redefining basic education for Latin America: lessons to be learned from the Colombian Escuela Nueva*. Paris : UNESCO.
- Schwandt, T.A.** (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human enquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 118-137). Thousand Oaks, California : Sage.
- Seidman, I.E.** (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research. a guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York : Columbia University.
- Shange, G.D.** (1995). *A study of factors affecting teaching and learning with special reference to standard ten physical science in selected African schools in rural areas of Kwazulu-Natal*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Natal, Kwazulu-Natal.
- Sharma, P. & Pandey, S.** (1996-7). *Handbook for primary school teachers on multigrade teaching*. Mysore : Regional Institute of Education (NCERT).
- Sharma, P., Pandey, L., Vishwanathappa, G. & Pandey, S.** (1997). *Impact of interventional strategies on attainment of MLL competencies in multigrade schools : research report*. Mysore : Regional Institute of Education (NCERT).
- Slavin, R.E.** (1993). Ability grouping in middle grades: achievement effects and alternatives. *The Elementary School Journal*, 93 (5), p 535-549.
- Smith, C.** (1995). *The kids. That's what we were about. The social organisation of teachers of diverse race and culture in a South African high school: a case study*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oregon, Oregon.
- South Africa** (Republic). Department of Education. (1995). *White paper on education and training*. Cape Town : Government Printer.
- South Africa.** Department of Education. (1997). *Education and management information services (EMIS)*. Pretoria : Government Printer.
- South Africa.** Department of Education. (1997). *Overcoming barriers to learning and development*. Report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS). Pretoria : Government Printer.
- Stenhouse, L.** (1975). *An introduction to curriculum research and development*. London : Heineman Educational Books.
- Teaching combined grade classes: real problems and promising practises.* (1990). Charleston : Appalachia Education Laboratory.
- Torres, R.M.** (1993). *Reaching the unreached : non-formal approaches and universal primary education*. New York : UNICEF.
- UNESCO.** (1981). *Education of disadvantaged groups and multiple class teaching: studies and innovative approaches*. Bangkok : UNESCO.

- UNESCO.** (1988). *Multiple class teaching in primary schools : a methodological guide*. Bangkok : UNESCO.
- UNESCO.** (1995a). *Managing schools for better quality: multigrade teaching and school clusters*. Bangkok : UNESCO.
- UNESCO.** (1995b). *Multigrade teaching in primary schools*. Bangkok : UNESCO.
- UNICEF.** (1992). *Multigrade organisation for primary schools*. South East Asia Region : Rosa Education Studies.
- Veenman, S.** (1995). Cognitive and noncognitive effects of multigrade and multiage classes : a best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 65 (4), 319-381.
- Veenman, S. & Raemaekers, J.** (1995). Long-term effects of a staff development programme on effective instruction and classroom management for teachers in multigrade classes. *Educational Studies*, 21(2), 167-185.
- Verspoor, A.M.** (1991). Twenty years of world bank support for basic education. presentation and evaluation. *Prospect*, XXI (3), 313-329.
- Vygotsky, L. S.** (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press.
- Wadsworth, B.** (1978). *Piaget for the classroom teacher*. New York : Longman.
- Wadsworth, B.** (1989). *Piaget's theory of cognitive and affective development*. (4th ed.). New York : Longman.
- Walsh, P.** (1993). *Education and meaning philosophy in practice*. London : Cassell Education Ltd.
- Way, J.W.** (1979). Verbal interaction in multiage classrooms. *The Elementary School Journal*, 79 (3), 178-186.
- Way, J.W.** (1980). The effects of multiage grouping on verbal interaction, achievement and self-concept. 112th Annual conference of the American Association of School Administrators (pp. 15-18). Anaheim : American Association of School Administrators.
- Way, J.W.** (1981). Achievement and self-concept in multiage classrooms. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 6 (2), 68-75.
- Wickham, S.** (1999). (Research methodology course). Lecture notes, Education Department, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Wolcott, F.W.** (1990). Writing up qualitative research. *Qualitative Research Methods*, 20. Newbury Park, CA. : Sage.

INTERVIEWS

- Becker, J.** (1998). Interview with parent at school 2.
- Bellini, G.** (1998). Interview with parent at school 2.
- Canon, P.** (1998). Interview with parent at school 1.
- Chapman, M.** (1998a). Interview with researcher.
- Chapman, M.** (1998b). Interview with researcher.
- Dean, D.** (1998). Interview with parent at school 2.
- Forester, K.** (1998). Interview with principal at school 1.
- Greene, L.** (1998). Interview with teacher at school 1.
- Hill, H.** (1998). Interview with parent at school 4.
- Hines, J.** (1998). Interview with principal at school 2.
- Larkin, M.** (1998). Interview with teacher at school 3.
- Lawson, S.** (1998). Interview with teacher at school 4.
- Ministry officials.** (1998). Interview with Education Ministry Officials.
- Oldman, V.** (1998). Interview with teacher at school 2.
- Penny, S.** (1998). Interview with parent at school 2.
- Sauer, L.** (1998). Interview with parent at school 2.
- Stampier, E.** (1998). Interview with teacher at school 1.
- Stone, T.** (1998). Interview with teacher at school 1.
- Taft, S.** (1998). Interview with teacher at school 1.
- Wren, M.** (1998). Interview with parent at school 4.

ANNEXURE A

Interview Schedules

DESIGN OF THE INTERVIEW WITH PRINCIPAL

1. INTRODUCTORY

- introduce self; [Stand up to greet and invite the interviewee to be seated.]
Good afternoon, I am so pleased to have this opportunity to meet you. Thank you for taking time to meet me and for agreeing to share some of your views with me.

- restate purpose of the interview; As I explained previously, I am here to learn about the multigrade method of teaching in order to determine whether it is suitable for implementation, as a form of teaching, in my province in South Africa. I am conducting this research for a Master's degree thesis or dissertation at Rhodes University in South Africa.

- deal with contract; At the very onset, I must explain clearly to you that I am not here to evaluate or judge your programme. I am here to observe and learn about this form of teaching and perhaps, use what I learn to improve my knowledge of how to deal with multigrade education in South Africa. I must assure you that everything you tell me is regarded in the utmost confidence. No one but I will have access to the actual tapes and transcription. Your name may remain anonymous in my thesis. However, I do wish to have your permission to record this session, and to be able to use parts of this information in my thesis and later on, in presentations that I may share with others at conferences or lectures. Of course, you will remain anonymous. I also require your consent to publish any of this information at a later stage if the need arises.

- recording; Are you comfortable with me recording this interview? If you would like to listen to the recording at any point please, say so. If you feel uncomfortable at any point I shall switch it off if you so require. I want you to be as comfortable as possible during this interview.

- sign contract: Are you happy to sign this form now? It is the agreement that I shall keep your information in confidence and that you will allow me to record and use the information as stated herein. [Form for contact details may also be filled in now.]

- clarify definition of multigrade; Do you use any term to describe this class with children of more than one grade or age group? If so, which term do you use? I am aware that the term multigrade can mean different things to different people. Is it used here at all? If so, how is it used here? What do you understand by this term?

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Principal :

- no. of years at school; For how long have you been the principal of this school?

- local?; Are you from this area? How long have you lived in this community? Where are you from originally?

School:

- school hours and breaks; When did the multigrade programme commence? How long is the school day? Are there shift classes? Define what this means.

- history of school; Tell me about the history of your school. How old is the school?

- context - rural/urban; How would you describe this school in terms of urban, semi-urban or rural?

- socio-economic status; How do people in this community make a living? What is their main occupation?

- predominant cultural group; How many cultural or ethnic groups attend this school? Which is the predominant cultural group in this school? What is the language of instruction? What is the home language of the majority of the children?

- state school/private/other?; Is this a State or private school?

- economic status; How is the school funded? How do you cope with the resources?

- facilities and resources; How are the equipment and materials and other resources for the school provided for? In your opinion are they adequate? How does the school fund the development or acquisition of materials?

- salary; How do the salaries multigrade teachers receive compare with the salaries of single grade teachers?

Teacher:

- teacher selection process; Can you describe how teachers are selected, especially those who teach in the multigrade class? Is multigrade teaching experience a criterion?

- teacher education; What kind of teacher education have these teachers received? How much of their teacher education course deals with multigrade teaching? Would they have completed any practicals at multigrade schools in order to gain experience?

- professional support; What kind of professional support does the school receive from central or State authorities ? For example, do supervisors or inspectors visit? [By this time I would have familiarised myself with the correct terminology for support staff]. How often do they visit? Tell me about these visits? What do they entail? What education for supporting multigrade teaching have they received? What kind of teaching assistance does the teacher receive? Do the teachers sometimes have an aide or assistant? How does this compare with single grade classrooms?

Class:

- no. of children in the school: What is the student enrolment at this school? How many classes are there?

- grade combinations; What are the grade combinations at this school?

- age combinations; What is the age range of children in this school? How are children of different ages combined in the different classes.

- student/ teacher ratios; Can you describe the student/ teacher ratios?

Programme

- multigrade programme; When did the multigrade programme commence? Can you tell me about how it all started? What were the reasons behind this move? In other words why does the school have multigrade teaching.

- status of multigrade classes; Is multigrade teaching generally a recognised form of schooling In South Africa, as in many countries around the world, we pretend that multigrade classes do not exist or that it is hardly prevalent. What, do you believe, is the status of these schools in India? How does this impact on various areas of, your management of the school, for example, funding, teacher education, etc.

3. THE MULTIGRADE CLASSROOM

- Classroom management; In your opinion, how is the multigrade approach applied in the classroom? In terms of the physical space in the classroom, how does the teacher cope with children of differing grades/ ages in one classroom? Where does the teacher spend most of her time? At her station or moving around the class?

- Discipline; What are your comments on discipline in the multigrade classrooms?

- Curriculum and materials; What, do you believe, makes the curriculum, programme and materials relevant to the children in terms of their own culture and lifestyle? How is the curriculum adapted for multigrade teaching? How does this compare with single grade classes? What is your view on the importance of teaching resources in the classrooms?
- Assessment; What methods of assessment are used? What is your opinion of these methods? How effective are these methods?

4. TEACHING METHODS

- Teaching methods; Which teaching methods do you believe are most effective in the multigrade classroom? Can you elaborate on this a little further.
- Approach; Would you comment on how the programme is meeting the needs of all the children for example older and younger; disabled; children of different cultural groups; boys and girls. What are some of the things the children do?
- Children; How would you describe the children in the multigrade classroom? What are some of their distinguishable characteristics? How do they interact with one another?

Attitudes towards multigrade

- of the teacher; In your opinion, what are your teacher's attitudes towards multigrade teaching?
- students; How would you describe the children's attitude to being in a class with other children from different grades and of differing ages?
- supervisors and authorities; What in your opinion, is the attitude of education officials toward multigrade schooling?
- principal; If you had a choice, which form of teaching, multigrade or single grade, would you prefer and why?

5. PARENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT

Attitudes towards multigrade; Describe the parent's/community's attitudes towards multigrade teaching? Are they supportive of this system? [I know this is a question eliciting a yes/no response but I think it is necessary to first know whether support exists before one asks for example;] How do parents express/demonstrate their support? Do you sometimes detect concerns or dissatisfaction/concerns? What would you say is the cause of their concerns? How do you as the principal of the school deal with these concerns?

Involvement; Tell me about how the parents or the community are involved in the school. For instance, do they help with fund raising, management, maintenance of the buildings or materials development? How does their involvement impact on you, the children and the school programme?

6. FINDINGS -Observed effects on the children

- Cognitive; Can you describe the impact of multigrade teaching on the children cognitively or academically? On what do you base these observations? You have children in single grade classes, how would you say multigrade teaching compares in terms of cognitive development? [I assume this will be a subjective response] However, if they claim to have evidence in the form of records, I shall ask if I may have access to these since it may be useful to back up this qualitative report with some quantitative data.]

- Non-cognitive/ psycho-social; How does the multigrade classroom impact on the children socially and emotionally? Describe how they relate to others. Are they more co-operative, sociable, polite? How would you describe their sense of self esteem? Would you describe them as motivated and happy? Describe their attitude towards themselves, their peers and their school. How have they adjusted personally and socially? How does this compare with the children in the single grade classes?

Advantages/ disadvantages; What in your opinion are the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade schooling? In your opinion, how does this compare with the advantages and disadvantages of single grade schooling?

7. CONCLUSION

- Evaluation of the programme; Has this programme been evaluated? If yes, by whom, when and how often. What have been some of the findings of this evaluation? Are you privy to this information? Have there been any changes in response to the evaluation? Can you describe some of these changes? What do you believe can be done to improve the multigrade class?
- Key to a successful multigrade class; What in your opinion is the single most important feature that can contribute to a successful multigrade classroom? How can this be achieved? How does this compare with a single grade class?
- Future; What additional education does the teacher need to be more effective as a multigrade teacher? What should she include in her method in order to be more effective? What changes would you recommend for the curriculum or instructional materials, if any?
- Opportunity to follow up questions by mail; If I think of additional information that I may need later, would it be fine for me to contact you by mail or fax, for further information?
- Express gratitude; I cannot tell you how much I appreciate what you have shared with me. I am so grateful to you. Would you like me to play back just a little bit for you to listen to? If you would like, I could try to send you a copy of my report when it is completed. Once again, you may be assured of confidentiality.

DESIGN OF THE INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER

1. INTRODUCTORY

- introduce self; [Stand up to greet and invite the interviewee to be seated.]
Good afternoon, I am so pleased to have this opportunity to meet you. Thank you for taking time to meet me and for agreeing to share some of your views with me.

- restate purpose of the interview; As I explained previously, I am here to learn about the multigrade method of teaching in order to determine whether it is suitable for implementation, as a form of teaching, in my province in South Africa. I am conducting this research for a Master's degree thesis or dissertation at Rhodes University in South Africa.

- deal with contract; At the very onset, I must explain clearly to you that I am not here to evaluate or judge your programme. I am here to observe what multigrade teaching is all about in your school and I am pleased to have the opportunity to be here. I am here to observe and learn about this form of teaching and perhaps, use what I learn to improve my knowledge of how to deal with multigrade education in South Africa. I must assure you that everything you tell me is regarded in the utmost confidence. No one but I will have access to the actual tapes and transcription. Your name may remain anonymous in my thesis. However, I do wish to have your permission to record this session, and to be able to use parts of this information in my thesis and later on, in presentations that I may share with others at conferences or lectures. Of course, you will remain anonymous. I also require your consent to publish any of this information at a later stage if the need arises.

- recording; Are you comfortable with me recording this interview. If you would like to listen to the recording at any point please, say so. If you feel uncomfortable at any point I shall switch it off if you so require. I want you to be as comfortable as possible during this interview? Are you happy to sign this form now which is the agreement that I shall keep your information in confidence and that you will allow me to record and use the information as stated herein?

- clarify definition of multigrade; Do you use any term to describe this class with children of more than one grade or age group. If so, which term do you use? -I am aware that the term multigrade can mean different things to different people. Is it used here at all? If so, how is it used here? What do you understand by this term?

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I would like to check the information that I received on this form and see that I have your correct details.

Teacher :

- qualifications and experience; Can you tell me about your teaching qualifications?
For how long have you been teaching now?
- no. of years at school; How long have you been teaching at this school?
- local? Are you from this area?; How long have you lived in this community? Where are you from originally?
- no. of years teaching in a multigrade class; How long have you been teaching in a multigrade classroom?
- professional support; Do you receive any professional support? What kind of professional support do you receive? For example, do supervisors or inspectors visit? (By this time I would have familiarised myself with correct terminology for support staff.) How often do they visit? Tell me about these visits? What do they entail? What education do the support staff receive for supporting multigrade teaching? Any in-service courses?

School:

- multigrade programme; When did the multigrade programme commence? Can you tell me about how it all started. ? What were the reasons behind this move? In other words, why does the school have multigrade teaching.
- school hours and breaks; How long is the school day? Are there shift classes? Tell me more about this.
- language; What is the language of instruction? What is the home language of the majority of the children?
- no. of children in classroom; How many children are there in your classroom?
- grade combinations; How many different grades do you have in your classroom? Can you tell me specifically, how many children per grade?
- age combinations; What is the age range of the children in your classroom? Can you tell me, specifically, how many children of each age there are in the classroom? i.e. how many six year olds; how many seven year olds etc.

- teacher/child ratios; Are you the only teacher in the classroom? Do you have a teaching aide or an assistant, either full-time or part-time? What is the situation in single grade classes?
- economic status; Do the children pay fees? How do you collect these fees? [This will tell me too if there are problems around the payment of fees.]
- facilities and resources; I saw some of your equipment and materials earlier this morning. Can you tell me how they are provided for? Who provides them? In your opinion are they adequate? What do you do when you need additional materials?

3. ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE MULTIGRADE CLASSROOM

Space and physical environment; [This will probably be evident from the observation. The interview may help me to understand and clarify what was observed.] Given the diversity of grades and ages in your classroom, how have you used the physical space in the classroom? What methods of arranging the physical environment have been useful to you? How are the desk/tables arranged? Is it fixed or flexible? Where is the teacher's station? Do you spend much time there or do you have to move about? Is there enough space for the equipment? How do you cope with problems, if any? Are there learning centres? How does this arrangement of the class compare with single grade classes?

Children

- grouping; How are the children organised for the different activities during the day? Can you tell me more about how they are grouped for their different activities. In your opinion, how does this differ from single grade classes? Do the children have any say in how they are grouped?
- special educational needs; Are there children with special educational needs in the classroom. If so, how many are there? Can you tell me about them? How are they accommodated in the multigrade classroom? How does this compare with single grade classes?
- discipline; In your class, you have children of differing ages and abilities? How do you handle discipline in this kind of environment? How is it different from single grade classes? [I would be looking for any indications of developing self discipline among learners] How do learners respond to class or group rules? How do you manage these situations?

The Curriculum
- what kind
of curriculum?

Let us talk about the curriculum. Is it a specific multigrade curriculum? Have you devised your own curriculum or do you use an external curriculum? Have you adapted the curriculum to suit the multigrade class? If so, how? How does this compare with the way the curriculum is implemented in the single graded classes? In your opinion, which works better and why?

- relevance to
local context;

Does the curriculum reflect the community and environment in which the child lives? If so, describe how it reflects their language, culture and values. If not, describe any steps that you have taken to make the curriculum more meaningful to these children. How does this compare with what is done in single grade classes?

- integration of
curriculum;

How is the curriculum presented to the children? Are the different subjects taught separately or do you integrate them into various programmes? If they are integrated, elaborate on how this is done. How does this compare with what goes on in single grade classes?

Materials

- what kind of
materials are used;

With so many children of differing ages and grades, what types of materials do you provide. Do you improvise your own materials? Are parents involved in any way? How?

- how are they
used;

Describe how these materials, if any, are used in the multigrade classroom. What kinds of adaptations of the materials are necessary for multigrade teaching. What do you do when an older child works with materials that are meant for younger children? What do you do when younger children want to try out equipment or materials designed for the older grades?

Assessment

- what, how,
why and when;

Do you assess the children? How do you assess the children? What do you assess? How often do you assess? What methods do you use for assessing? Why do you believe you are assessing? When do you assess? Are the children involved in assessment? If so, how? Do the children assess each other, i.e. peer or group assessment? How does your method of assessment differ from the way you would assess in a single grade class? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

- recording;

When and how is the assessment recorded? Will you show me an example later?

4. TEACHING METHOD

Philosophy and approach

- learner-centred; How would you describe your teaching approach? What teaching philosophy do you follow? Is this different from your philosophy when teaching a single grade class? How? How do you go about determining what your learner's needs are? How would you describe the children in your class? Are they independent or dependent on you? Are they responsible and motivated? Do they have a good self esteem? How do you know this? Are children involved in the teaching and learning that happens in your classroom? How? How do you design your instruction to meet the needs of both older and younger children. How do you ensure that there are challenging activities to meet the needs of the older children What about the children with special educational needs, if any? How are their needs being met? Describe any experiences in the classroom that develop responsibility and independence in the children? How do you instil motivation in the children? [I would use this opportunity to raise issues that I had observed earlier.] Does this differ from single grade classes in any way?

- co-operative and participatory; How would you describe the classroom environment? Where in the classroom do you spend most of the day? i.e. at the front teaching, moving from learner to learner or group to group? How do learner's interact with one another? In which way do the children participate in the learning process? [I would want them to be specific] Can you tell me more about that? How does it compare with single grade classes? [In a co-operative approach children should work together in a group on "a clearly assigned collective activity without direct and immediate supervision from the teacher." (Veenman 1995: 373).]

- active learning; Describe some of the things that learners do in the classroom. Does active learning occur in the classroom? If so, describe active learning as it occurs within or across subjects. How does this compare with single grade classes? [NB If this has come up in response to earlier questions there is no need to ask again. On the other hand, the response then may not have been adequate and instead of exploring further then, I could ask it in a different way later, which is now.]

Instructional strategies

- groupings; Are the children grouped for certain activities? If so, describe how -this is done. Please tell me how this helps your instruction/ teaching method. Describe how you teach different things to the different groups. How does this compare with single grade classes?

How much of the day would you say is spent on whole class teaching in relation to group teaching? [If whole class teaching is the only method ask; have you ever considered group teaching?]

- peer tutoring; Are there times when the children teach one another? Can you tell me more about this? In your opinion, is it effective? What is the situation in single grade classes? What are some of your concerns about peer tutoring?
- self directed strategies; Do the children also work by themselves during the day in self directed activities. How do they go about this? What materials do they use for this purpose? How do the younger children respond to this method? In your opinion, how effective are self directed strategies in single grade classes?
- individual teaching; What do you do when children may need individual attention or instruction? How does this compare with single grade classes?
- learning centres; [Once again, questions here will relate to what was observed. These may or may not be a feature of the classroom.] You told me earlier about the classroom arrangement? What are the learning/activity centres all about? How are they a part of your instruction method? How effective are learning centres in single grade classes?
- team teaching; Do the teachers plan or teach as a team? Can you tell me all about it? Is it effective? How? What subjects do these teachers teach? How does this compare with single grade classes?

Attitudes towards multigrade

- of the teacher; Having shared all this information about the curriculum, teaching methods etc., what is your attitude towards multigrade teaching? Is it effective? I take it you have taught in a single classrooms before [or you said earlier that you had spent x years teaching in a single grade school] how does multigrade teaching compare. If you had a choice which method would you prefer and, why?
- of the principal; What do you believe the principal's attitude towards multigrade teaching is? What is the attitude of the other staff towards multigrade teaching?
- students; How would you describe the children's attitude to being in a class with other children from different grades and of differing ages? Have they expressed their views to you?

Peer relationships; Describe how the children interact with one another? Who would you say helps each other more? Do older children help the younger children? Do more competent children help others irrespective of age? Some claim that older children may be helping too much and therefore younger children become dependent on them. How do you cope with this situation? What about younger children? How does all of this differ from a single grade class?

5. PARENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT

Attitudes towards multigrade teaching; What are the parent's attitudes towards multigrade teaching? Are they supportive of this system. [I know this is a question eliciting a 'yes/no' response but I think it is necessary to first know whether something exists before I ask further questions about it.] How do parents express/demonstrate their support? Do you sometimes detect concerns or dissatisfaction/concerns? What would you say is the cause of their concern? Are there things that you do to allay these concerns?

Involvement; Tell me about how the parents or the community is involved in the school. For instance, do they help with fundraising, maintenance, management, materials development etc. How does their involvement impact on you, the children, the programme. How does this compare with single grade classes?

6. FINDINGS -Observed effects on the children

- Cognitive; Can you describe the impact of multigrade teaching on the children cognitively or academically? What are your reasons for making these observations? You have taught children in single grade classes, how would you say multigrade teaching compares in terms of cognitive development? [I assume this will be subjective. However, if they claim to have evidence in the form of records, I shall ask if I may have access to these since it may be useful to back up this qualitative report with some quantitative data.]

- Non-cognitive/psycho-social; How does the multigrade classroom impact on the children socially and emotionally. Describe how they relate to others. Are they more co-operative, sociable, polite; How would you describe their sense of self esteem? Would you describe them motivated and happy? Describe their attitude towards themselves, their peers and their school. How have they adjusted personally and socially? How does this compare with children in single grade classes?

Advantages and disadvantages;

In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade teaching? How does this compare with the advantages and disadvantages of single grade classes?

7. CONCLUSION

Evaluation of the programme;

Has this programme been evaluated? If yes, by whom, when and how often. What have been some of the findings of this evaluation? Are you privy to this information? Have there been changes in the programme in response to the evaluation. Can you describe some of these changes?

Improving multigrade teaching;

What do you believe has been your greatest strength in teaching this multigrade class? What from your past education or experience has equipped you to deal with this situation? What do teachers require in their preservice or inservice education to better equip them to teach in a classroom like this one? In other words, if you went back to college now, what should they include in your course? What should teacher include in their method in order to be more effective in this kind of classroom? How does all of this compare with single grade classes?

Opportunity to follow up questions by mail;

If I think of something later, perhaps when I get home, would it be fine for me to contact you by mail or fax, for any further information?

Express gratitude;

I simply cannot tell you how much I appreciate what you have shared with me. I am so grateful to you. Once again, you may be assured of confidentiality. Would you like me to play back just a little bit for you to listen to? If you want, I could try to send you a copy of my report when it is completed.

DESIGN OF INTERVIEW WITH PARENT/COMMUNITY PERSON

1. INTRODUCTORY

- introduce self; [Standing up to greet and showing the interviewee to a seat, inviting him/ her to sit.] Good afternoon, I am so pleased to have this opportunity to meet with you. Thank you so much for taking time to meet with me and to agree to share information with me.

- restate purpose interview; As I explained previously, I am here to learn about the multigrade method of teaching in order to determine its suitability for implementation as a form of teaching in my province in South Africa. I am conducting this research for a Master's degree thesis or dissertation at Rhodes University in South Africa.

- deal with contract; At the very onset I must explain clearly to you that I am not here to evaluate or judge this school, the teacher or the children. I am here merely to observe what multigrade teaching is all about and your school is one such example, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to be here. I am here to observe and learn about this form of teaching and perhaps use what I learn to improve my knowledge about how to deal with multigrade education in South Africa. The reason that I would like to interview you is because you have children in this class and you play an important role in this school. I am interested to learn what your views as a parent are about multigrade teaching. I must assure that everything you tell me is regarded in the utmost confidence, and is only between you and me. No one but I shall have access to the actual tapes and transcription. Your name may remain anonymous in my thesis. However, I do wish to have your permission to record this session, and to be able to use parts of this information in my thesis and in presentations that I may share with others at conferences or lectures. Of course, you will remain anonymous. I also require your consent to publish any of this.

- share contact details; Before we begin may we just take some time to introduce ourselves again. [Introductions here] I would like to check if I have your correct contact details.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Parent/ community person;
If you do not mind, could you tell me a bit about yourself and your family. Have you always lived here? How big is your family? How many children do you have? What is your occupation? What is the occupation of your spouse?
- no. of children at school;
How many of your children attend this school?
- ages;
What are the ages of your children and in which grades are they? Do you have two children of differing ages and grades in one classroom?
- other schools;
Do any of your children attend other schools? Please give details. What are the reasons for this?

3. ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTIGRADE CLASSROOM

The children

- why multigrade;
Can you explain some of the reasons why your children are in a multigrade classroom? Is it out of choice or are there no other alternatives available to you? What do you believe are the advantages and disadvantages of a multigrade classroom for your children?
- classroom management;
What is your opinion of your older and younger child being taught in one class? [In my preliminary letter I shall request that I speak to a parent who has more than one child in the multigrade classroom, if possible.]
- discipline;
Given that there are younger and older children in one classroom, what is your opinion about the behaviour of the children? In your opinion, are they well behaved? If yes or no, tell me more about their behaviour. If possible, can you comment on how their behaviour compares with children from single grade classes?
- programme;
What is your child's response to the programme in the classroom? Is he/she stimulated? How does the older one respond? And the younger one? Is the programme reflective of this community? Can you relate to what your child is learning? How does the programme meet your children's needs? If possible, can you comment on how this compares with children in single grade classrooms? How does the learning programme help your child to relate/interact with the community? What are some of the things that the child learns that help you at home? What have you found in your child's learning that helps them to have better life in the community?

- homework; Does the child get homework? How much? Are you required to assist your children in their homework? Can you tell me a little more about how you do this?

Attitudes towards multigrade teaching

- students; How do the children relate to one another either in or outside the classroom? What do you believe their attitude towards multigrade teaching is? How do they respond to this method of teaching? If you have other children in single grade classes, is it possible for you to compare these attitudes with those of children in the single grade classes?

- parent; As a parent, do you have any concerns regarding this teaching approach? What are these concerns?

4. INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL

-involvement; Can you comment on the role of parents in your school? Tell me about your involvement in the school? Describe your relationship with the school. Do you serve on any school committees? Do you attend meetings regularly? Do you help with fund-raising, materials development and maintenance? Can you tell me more about it? Do you assist the teacher sometimes? Do you assess your children at home? How? If you are concerned about the children, are you able to discuss them with the teacher? Do you discuss your child's progress with the teacher?

5. FINDINGS - Observed effects on the children

- cognitive; What are your comments on the impact of multigrade teaching on your children's development? How does it effect their learning? Are you happy with the progress your child is making in this classroom?

- non-cognitive/
psycho-social; It is claimed that children in multigrade classes are more sociable, is this your experience? Describe the child's attitude towards themselves, their peers and their school. What are your comments on the effects of multigrade class teaching on your children's sense of responsibility, independence and self esteem? In your opinion, is your child learning to be good and well-mannered? How does your child help with chores at home? Can your child take care of him/her self? Do they care for their younger sisters and brothers? In which way do they do this? Does your child enjoy doing his/her school work? Does your child speak easily about his school and school work?

Advantages and disadvantages ;

In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade schooling? What do you like about this kind of teaching? What don't you like about this kind of teaching? If you have children in single grade classes, can you comment on the advantages and disadvantages in single grade classes and how they compare? What do you believe can be done to make teaching in the multigrade class more effective?

6. CONCLUSION

Any questions;

Do you have any questions? Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Opportunity to follow up questions by mail;

If I think of something later, perhaps when I get home, would it be fine for me to contact you by mail or through the school, should I require any further information?

Express gratitude;

I simply cannot tell you how much I appreciate what you have shared with me. I am so grateful to you. Would you like me to play back a bit for you to listen to? If you would like, I could try to send you a copy of my report when it is completed. Once again, you may be assured of confidentiality.

DESIGN OF INTERVIEW WITH RESEARCHER

1. INTRODUCTORY

- introduce self; [Stand up to greet and invite the interviewee to be seated.] Good afternoon, I am so pleased to have this opportunity to meet you. Thank you for taking time to meet me and for agreeing to share some of your views with me.

- restate purpose As I explained previously, I am here to learn about the multigrade of the interview; method of teaching in order to determine whether it is suitable for implementation, as a form of teaching, in my province in South Africa. I am conducting this research for a Master's degree thesis or dissertation at Rhodes University in South Africa.

- deal with contract; At the very onset, I must explain clearly to you that I am not here to evaluate or judge your programme. I am here to observe what multigrade teaching is all about in your school and I am pleased to have the opportunity to be here. I am here to observe and learn about this form of teaching and perhaps, use what I learn to improve my knowledge of how to deal with multigrade education in South Africa. I must assure you that everything you tell me is regarded in the utmost confidence. No one but I will have access to the actual tapes and transcription. Your name may remain anonymous in my thesis. However, I do wish to have your permission to record this session, and to be able to use parts of this information in my thesis and later on, in presentations that I may share with others at conferences or lectures. Of course, you will remain anonymous. I also require your consent to publish any of this information at a later stage, if the need arises.

- recording; Are you comfortable with me recording this interview. If you would like to listen to the recording at any point please, say so. If you feel uncomfortable at any point I shall switch it off if you so require. I want you to be as comfortable as possible during this interview? Are you happy to sign this form now which is the agreement that I shall keep your information in confidence and that you will allow me to record and use the information as stated herein?

- clarify definition of MG; I am aware that multigrade can mean different things to different people especially from country to country. How is it used here? What do you mean by the term multigrade? Are any other terms being used? If so, which terms and how are they being used?

Research on this topic in Canada; How common is research on this issue? Why?

Experience with multigrade classrooms; Tell me about your experience in this area.

2. CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Status of multigrade classes in India; What is the status of multigrade schools within the official education system? How does this impact on research?

History of multigrade; What is the history of multigrade schools in Canada. For how long have they been in existence?

Context; In what kind of context are multigrade schools commonly found? What are the circumstances under which these schools exist?

Rural/urban; The literature seems to indicate that multigrade schools occur mainly in rural areas. Can you tell me more about this? How does this compare with single grade schools? How prevalent are multigrade schools in urban environments? How does geographic terrain affect the prevalence of multigrade schools? Why?

Student: teacher ratios; If possible, can you tell me what the average class size is? What is the average student teacher ratio? How does this compare with single grade schools?

Economic factors; What is the economic status of the people in these areas? What is their chief occupation? How is schooling financed? Do the children pay fees? Is this true of single grade schools as well?

Facilities and resources; What is the standard of the school facilities and resources? How are they provided for? How does this compare with single grade schools? Who provides the equipment and materials? In your opinion, are they adequate? Are communities expected to contribute? If so, how? How are they involved in making materials?

Grade; Which grades are most commonly combined? What do you think are the reasons for this?

Age; Which age groups are commonly combined? What are the reasons for this?

3. TEACHER EDUCATION

Teachers

Recruiting teachers; How are teachers recruited for multigrade schools? What criteria, if any, are used? Please elaborate. How does this compare with single grade classrooms?

Qualifications and experience; What qualifications do the multigrade normally have? What are the required qualifications for single grade class teachers? On average, are teachers expected to have some teaching experience before they are assigned to a multigrade class? If so, describe the type and length of experience expected?

Teacher education; In one of your books you mention that there is no pre-service education for multigrade teachers? Can you tell me more about this? Has this situation changed since?

Handbooks/in-service; Are there any textbooks, handbooks, and in-service packages on multigrade teaching? How are they used for pre- and in-service teacher education? Do you envisage any changes in teacher education as a result of these books? If so, what changes and when?

Teaching

- no. of years at school; For what period are teachers normally posted to these schools? Is this true too of other schools?

- local? Are the teachers who are posted to these schools from the same area? What are the reasons for this?

- professional support? What kind of professional support do the teachers in multigrade classes receive? For example, do supervisors or inspectors visit. How does this compare with single grade classes? How often do the support staff visit? What do their visits entail? What education for supporting multigrade teaching have they received? What kind of teaching assistance does the teacher receive? Do teachers sometimes have an aide or assistant? How does this compare with single grade classrooms?

- language; What is the national language of instruction? How does this differ from state to state? What about minority groups?

- school hours and breaks; How long is the school day? Are shift classes prevalent? If so, could you tell me more about it?

4. ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE MULTIGRADE CLASSROOM

- Space and physical environment; Given the diversity of grades and ages in the multigrade room, how do the teachers organise and manage the physical space in the classroom? What methods of arranging the physical environment have been found to be useful in These schools? How are the desk/tables arranged? Is this fixed or flexible? Where is the teacher's station? Where in the classroom do the teacher's spend most of their time? What is the incidence of learning centres?
- Children
- grouping How are the children organised for different activities during the day? How they are grouped for their different activities?
- special educational needs; What is the status of children with special educational needs? Are they included in the classroom? If so, how are they accommodated in the multigrade classroom? What is their status in single grade classrooms?
- discipline; In your opinion, are there differences in children's behaviour in the multigrade classroom as compared to the single grade classroom? What are these differences? How does the teacher handle discipline in the multigrade classroom? What are the ways in which self-discipline amongst the pupils is encouraged. How do learners respond to class or group rules? How does this compare with single grade classrooms?
- Curriculum What kind of curriculum is used in most multigrade schools? Is it a specific multigrade curriculum? How do the teachers adapt the curriculum to suit the multigrade class? What attempts are there to design their own curriculum? How does this compare with curriculum implementation in single grade classes.
- child-centred approach; How does the curriculum cater for the needs of the learner?
- relevance to local context; How does the curriculum reflect the community and environment in which the child lives? How does it reflect their language, culture and values? If it does not, describe any steps that are taken to make the curriculum more meaningful to these children. How does this compare with what is done in single grade classes?
- integration of curriculum; How is the curriculum presented to the children? Are the different subjects taught separately or are they integrated the various programmes? If the subjects are integrated, elaborate on how this is done?

Materials

- what kind of materials are used; With so many children of differing ages and grades, what types of materials are used in multigrade classrooms? How does this compare with the single grade classrooms? How are the teachers involved in materials development, if any? And the parents?
- how are they used; Describe how these materials are used in the multigrade classroom. In your experience, which materials work best and why? What kinds of adaptations of the materials are necessary for multigrade teaching? What is the practice when older children work with materials that are meant for younger children? Or, when younger children want to try out equipment or materials designed for the older grades?

Assessment

- what, how, why, when; What methods of assessment are more commonly in use? How does this compare with single grade classrooms? What do the teachers assess? How often do they assess? When do they assess the children? How are the children involved in assessment? Do the children assess each other, i.e. peer or group assessment? How is this done?
- recording; When and how is the assessment recorded?

5. TEACHING METHOD

Philosophy and approach

- learner-centred; What teaching philosophy is prevalent in the multigrade classes? How do the teachers determine the needs of the children? In your opinion, how do the children in these classrooms compare with the children in single grade classes? Are they generally, independent; or dependent; responsible and motivated? Do they have a good self-esteem? What are the indicators for this? How are the children involved in the teaching and learning that happens in the classroom? How does the teacher design his/her instruction to meet the needs of both the older and younger children? How do teachers ensure that there are challenging activities to meet the needs of the older children? What about the children with special educational needs? How are their needs being met? What activities or experiences in the classroom develop responsibility and independence in the children? How do the teachers instill motivation in the children? In what way, if at all, does this differ from single grade classes?

- co-operative and participatory teaching and learning; How do the children participate in the learning process? Do the learner's interact with one another? Elaborate please. Compare this with single grade teaching. [In a cooperative learning approach, children should work together in a group on "a clearly assigned collective activity without direct and immediate supervision from the teacher." (Veenman 1995: 373).]
- active learning; Describe some of the things that learners do in the classroom. How does active learning occur within or across subjects? Is this true too of single grade classes?

Instructional strategies

- groupings; How is grouping an instructional strategy? How are the different groups instructed? How much of the day is spent on whole class teaching in relation to group teaching?
- peer tutoring; How prevalent is peer tutoring? What are some of the ways in which the children teach one another? In your opinion, is it effective? How does this compare with single grade classes. What are some of your concerns about this method, if any?
- self-directed strategies; Do the children also work by themselves during the day in self-directed activities. How do they go about this? What materials do they use for this purpose? How do younger children respond to this method? How does this compare with single grade classes? Are self-directed strategies as effective in single grade classes?
- individual teaching; What happens when children may need individual attention or instruction in the multigrade class? How does this compare with single grade classes?
- learning centres; Are learning centres a part of the instruction method? How?
- team teaching; The method of team teaching, is it prevalent in multigrade schools? Elaborate on this, please. How effective is it? What about single grade classes?

6. ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTIGRADE SCHOOLS

- Researchers and educationists: What is the attitude of researchers towards multigrade schools? And other educationists, e.g. policy-makers, curriculum developers etc.? What are your reasons for saying this? What do you believe are the reasons for their attitudes?

- Ministry of education; What is the attitude of the education authorities towards multigrade schools? How are these attitudes evident? How does this compare with single grade schools?
- Teacher; In general, what are the teacher's attitudes towards multigrade teaching? If they had a choice, would they prefer to teach in multigrade or single grade classrooms? Why?
- Principal; What do you believe are the principals' attitudes towards multigrade teaching? How is this evident to you?
- Support staff; What is the attitude of support staff towards multigrade schools? What are the reasons for this?
- Students; How would you describe the children's attitude to being in a class with other children from different grades and of differing ages? How are these attitudes evident?
- Peer relationships; In your experience, how do the children interact with one another in a multigrade class? Who would you say helps each other more? Do older children help the younger children? Do more competent children help others, irrespective of age? Some claim that older children may be helping too much and therefore younger children become dependent on them. How do teachers cope with this kind of situation? What about younger children? How does this differ from single grade classes?

7. PARENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT

Attitudes towards multigrade

- In general; What are the parent's attitudes towards multigrade teaching? How are parents supportive? How do parents express/demonstrate their support? What are their concerns, if any? What are some of the ways in which these concerns may be addressed?
- Involvement; What, if any, are some of the ways in which the parents or the community are involved in the school? How does this impact on the schooling of their children? How does this compare with single grade schools?

8. COGNITIVE AND NON-COGNITIVE EFFECTS

- Cognitive; Has research been conducted on the cognitive or non-cognitive effects of multigrade teaching in Canada? If so, can you tell me briefly what the findings are? How does this compare with children in single grade classrooms? May I have access to these reports?
- Non-cognitive/psycho-social; How does the multigrade classroom impact on the children socially and emotionally. i.e. psycho-socially?
- Advantages and disadvantages; What in your opinion are the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade schooling? How does this compare with the advantages and disadvantages of single grade schooling?
- Status of research It appears that some research has been conducted by Gajadharsingh, Gomulchuk & Piland, Craig and McLellan and Chapman.
Can you describe the impact, if any, that this research has had on government policy and practice? What are some of the reasons for this?

9. CONCLUSION

- Evaluation of the programme; Has the Primary Program been evaluated? Have the multigrade classroom programmes been evaluated? If yes, by whom, when and how often? What have been some of the findings of this evaluation? Are you privy to this information? Have there been changes in the programme in response to the evaluation? Can you describe some of these changes, if any?
- Key to a successful multigrade class; What in your opinion is the single most important feature that can contribute to a successful multigrade classroom? How can this be achieved? How does this differ from a single grade class?
- Future of multigrade schools; What in your opinion does the future hold for multigrade schools in British Columbia, Canada? How do you think the education system will respond to these classes in the future? How will teacher education institutions respond?
- Opportunity to follow up questions by mail; Would it be fine for me to contact you by mail, fax or E-mail, for any further information?

SCHEDULE TWO FOR INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR CHAPMAN

KEY TO SUCCESSFUL MULTIGRADE TEACHING

In your opinion, what is the key to successful multigrade/multiage teaching?

TERMINOLOGY

- Use of terms multigrade and multiage interchangeably in the Canadian context.
- Respondents appeared to confuse the terms. What is Chapman's experience of this?
- Clarify definition of 'split' and 'family grouping'.

STATUS OF MULTIGRADE TEACHING

What are the impediments to multigrade teaching from the Ministry?

How may they be removed?

If they are removed, what policy changes would be desired?

PREVALENCE

How prevalent is multigrade teaching in B.C., Vancouver? Any references to explore?

FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Is the size of the classroom (space) specified by any official policy?

One teacher claimed that she had purchased her own materials and equipment. How common is this in Canada and why?

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

How widespread is the practice of cooperative learning? Is there a common approach in its application in the classroom?

Describe your understanding of cooperative learning.

What is the difference between the way it is implemented in single grade and multigrade classrooms?

Suggestions for further reading.

CURRICULUM

How do the application of curricula principles such as child-centred, needs-based, participatory approaches and relevance differ between multigrade and single grade schools?

In other words, how may these principles be applied more readily or successfully in a multigrade as opposed to a single grade classroom.

Primary Program

Originally, it was ungraded? When and how did this change?

How long did the ungraded approach last?

What was the nature of the political backlash?

When did the government change?

Who was responsible for the backlash?

You mentioned in the previous interview that there was a resistance to the backlash, from whom? When? What impact did it have?

How were children assessed when the curriculum was ungraded? At what points were the assessment criteria pegged i.e. at the end of grades, the division? Why and how has this changed? How do the benchmarks affect assessment in the primary division? What about the common outcomes for grades K/1 and 1 / 2 ?

Was the intermediate programme graded?

When did the IRP's first come out ?

Explain the Know- Wonder web. Is it part of the Primary Program?
How widely is it used? How and when did that come about?

Buddy system in reading

This system may be found in single classrooms too. How is it different in multigrade classrooms?

One parent complained that there are no textbooks, standardised testing and measurable goals. As someone who wrote the Primary Program, how would you respond to such a comment?

INTEGRATION

Some respondents mentioned the difficulties experienced in integrating the curriculum for grades 3 / 4 i.e. across the primary and intermediate divisions.

Is this concern a common one?

Why?

How did the Primary Program originally make integration easier?

ROTE LEARNING

How does the primary program discourage rote learning?

There was evidence of memorising for example the tables in some classes, how does this relate to rote learning?

OTHER CONCEPTS

Some respondents referred to metacognition? Can you tell me more about this concept?

How widespread is its use? How long has it been in use?

Explain the concepts of multiple intelligences?

One respondent mentioned the commitment to "an ethic of care". Is this commonly known and practiced?

Define the Honours Roll. What are the requirements for place on the Honours Roll?
Is it operational at elementary schools?

TEACHER EDUCATION

In the previous interview, you mentioned the apprenticeship model i.e. that teacher students are influenced not so much by what you teach them but by how you teach them?

Can you elaborate on this theory? How common is its practice in teacher education institutions?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Researcher Veenman (1995:371) claimed (on page 75 of draft) that research shows that learning is enhanced by direct instruction from the teachers. In your interview, you claimed that too much direct instruction was not good. Other respondents were of a similar view.

Can you explain your view in the light of Veenman's comments?

PARENTS

Some parents claimed that they were on a first name basis with the teachers which made them believe that the teachers were more approachable and accessible in the multigrade classrooms.

Is this not the case in most classrooms in Canada? How would single and multigrade schools differ?

How widespread is the practice of Parent Advisory Committees?
What exactly is their function/powers in general?

What recourse do parents, who are unhappy with multigrade teaching, have? For example, do you know of instances where they have removed their children from the school?

Contracts

When did the teacher contracts first come into being?

What exactly is the relation between teacher contracts and class size? Is there any flexibility?

Apparently, parents are not allowed to help in the class but they may be help their own children and in the process, other children too?

Can you describe this trend? How common is its practice?

CLARITY ON TRANSCRIPT OF PREVIOUS INTERVIEW

On p3-4, you stated that in your experience of single and multigrade classrooms you found the grade 1's in the multigrade situation to be more advanced than their counterparts in the single grade classrooms.

On what criteria do you base your observation? In which ways were these children more advanced?

On p 10, you mentioned teaching English Language Arts to two groups of Francophone children, one was French Immersion and the other ?

On same page, you mention 'hida' is that the hidatsu a First Nations group?

ANNEXURE B

Sample of Interview Transcripts

**SCHOOL 3 – DANZAR PARK*, BRITISH COLUMBIA
INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER - MS S LAWSON***

12 MARCH 1998

RESEARCHER: I am going to ask you some questions. In your teacher training, did you have any specific training on how to cope with a multi-grade classroom environment, situation?

10 **RESPONDENT:** No, not at all. The assumption was (with) the universities in the city, that everybody is going to end up in some nice school where there was one grade in every classroom and the supplies would be there and you will just follow the separate curriculum for each grade.

RESEARCHER: And in your practicum, because I know you did a practicum as well, did you have any?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: What kind of class were you put in?

RESPONDENT: I was mostly in straight grade classrooms, but I was in one split class where there was two grades.

RESEARCHER: Okay, so that was one class where there were two grades?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

20 **RESEARCHER:** Did that help you then, give you some experience in what you are doing today?

RESPONDENT: I think in terms of being open to the idea of having more than one grade in a classroom, but with two grades it is really still easy to kind of keep parallel curricula going and still be doing the curriculum... So in terms of being open to the idea of having more than one grade, that helped, but in terms of how you approach teaching when you have so many grades as compared to one or two, it is very different. I think that it does not have to be very different, but I think that if you come from a structure where you are used to having one grade in a classroom then you can still take that mindset and do it with two grades in a classroom. It is a stretch,

* Pseudonym

but you can still do it. When I first came to this school there were four grades in a classroom, kindergarten to grade 3 and...

RESEARCHER: When was that?

RESPONDENT: Twelve years ago.

RESEARCHER: Twelve years ago.

10 **RESPONDENT:** So already by the time you get four grades in a classroom you cannot keep four parallel curricula going and especially with the primary grades where a lot of the work is experiential and discussion. To keep those kind of things going when you have all those different curricula going, ...I tried and it was driving me crazy then I had to learn to do something different.

RESEARCHER: Do something differently?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: So you learnt it yourself through your own experience and through your own innovation, how to cope with it.

20 **RESPONDENT:** Partly it was okay, but at the same time I was realising that I had to change a lot of my teaching strategies. This was the first time that I had really worked with a large native population who were struggling with the traditional ways, that we had done instruction in a white community so I realised that I had to do some things different to account for their learning styles. So those two things came together for me at the same time and then I started looking at some workshops...

RESEARCHER: Two large challenges presented to you...

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: ...which you had had no prior support or training for?

RESPONDENT: No. We had not anything, no discussion on like different ethnic groups, cultures, different ways they learn.

RESEARCHER: And how to make the curriculum that you were teaching relevant?

RESPONDENT: That is right. We had nothing of that sort.

RESEARCHER: I am going to come to that, the relevance of the curriculum. Then I am still on with the support. Okay, considering that you did not get any practical training, you did not get any theoretical training in the whole education system, was there any support then being provided either by the district?

RESPONDENT: School district?

RESEARCHER: Yes, at school district level, or zonal level?

RESPONDENT: School district.

RESEARCHER: Where someone came in and assisted you with...?

10 **RESPONDENT:** No.

RESEARCHER: No?

RESPONDENT: Not at all.

RESEARCHER: No support whatsoever, okay. So you were very much left on your own then to figure out how to deal with...

RESPONDENT: Yes, you sink or swim. [laughter]

RESEARCHER: Okay. Tell me a little about the background of the school? Has it always been a multi-grade school?

RESPONDENT: It has always been a multi-grade school.

RESEARCHER: You said the school was about 100 years old?

20 **RESPONDENT:** Not this building, but the school, Danzar Park*.

RESEARCHER: Yes.

RESPONDENT: Yes, there have been three different buildings. Here the first one would have been built towards the end of the last century when the railways was being built here. There was a one-roomed school at that time and then at some point in its history there were enough people and it became a two-roomed school. Then,

through economic changes and stuff in this area the population dwindled again, there are not a lot of jobs, most of the parents in this area live under the poverty line so we became a one-roomed school and people were...

RESEARCHER: So this building you said this morning was about 35 years old?

RESPONDENT: 35 years old. It was built at the beginning of the 60's.

RESEARCHER: Why did people come out here originally? I am just asking this for background. Was there mining?

10 **RESPONDENT:** At one time this was a major hub of the railway transportation in our province. All trains going north and south, and east and west came through Danzar Park*.

RESEARCHER: Oh, I see.

RESPONDENT: So there were a lot of people here that worked on the railway. There has always been like orchards and that kind of stuff over here. It has also been a tourist place. We had steel-head salmon fishing, you know sports fishing. So that was the reason that people came.

RESEARCHER: Okay, I just wanted to get a general idea of the school because it was quite far driving out this way. Mountains looming on both sides and could not see any kind of crops that would be growing here, you know.

20 **RESPONDENT:** Like up on the hills and stuff there is grazing as far as cattle ranches and that.

RESEARCHER: Okay. There are some First Nations children, I mean the children are not all of one cultural group, are they?

RESPONDENT: No, there is about half that are native Indians, most of whom are from this tribal nation. There are a couple of children that are First Nations children that are Cree from back east. There is one student who is mixed black and Phillipino.

RESEARCHER: Is that Joshua?

RESPONDENT: Joshua. And the rest of the children would be some form of Caucasian background.

30 **RESEARCHER:** Okay. Obviously they are all instructed in English. Do any of

them have another language at home?

RESPONDENT: Yes, some of them have their First Nations language from this tribal area or Bobby and Jan also do Cree at home.

RESEARCHER: Oh.

RESPONDENT: All of the non-Native children, meaning children that are not in the nation group, which includes Joshua, all of them speak English as their first language.

10 **RESEARCHER:** Okay. Your number of children, has that changed of the 12 years that you have been here?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: What is the most that you have had?

RESPONDENT: 26.

RESEARCHER: 26, really?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: And you managed that all by yourself?

20 **RESPONDENT:** At that time there was another part-time teacher who came for 40% of the day. So I was alone by myself a part of the day then she came for part of the day.

RESEARCHER: Was it just for that year or was it for a couple of years?

RESPONDENT: Well, it was, one year there was 26 then another year there was 23. We have been as low as 10 one year, well it was not for the whole year but part of the year. For quite a while we were very transient at school. The Social Services was moving families in here, they were trying to get off the streets out of the city. So there were families with a lot of problems and not necessarily staying a long time, a few months and then (they) leave again. But it seemed to have evened out around 17 to 20 the last two years. -

30 **RESEARCHER:** So what did they send these people here for? I mean what work would they have done here?

RESPONDENT: There was no work.

RESEARCHER: Just a dumping ground?

RESPONDENT: Well, that is kind of how we feel and this is not the only small community it has happened to, it has happened to a lot of small communities.

RESEARCHER: Really?

RESPONDENT: Cost of living is cheaper here than in the city so it costs less to keep them. You see there are no services here. Right here there is a school, but no community services so it makes it very hard on the school. Right now we do not have any like that in this school.

10 **RESEARCHER:** Okay, I am going to ask you something... I am actually going to ask you some of my last questions first just to make sure I get them. I would like to know what you as an experienced teacher now, I mean you have been teaching forever in this way...

RESPONDENT: Twenty years all together.

RESEARCHER: With K-7. I am just amazed. What would you say are the key factors, main things, that needs to happen to make this kind of thing work, to make this a successful programme?

20 **RESPONDENT:** I think it requires a good broad base of training. If you specialise in something, that is not going to take you very far here because you have to be able to be reasonably good at a whole bunch of things.

RESEARCHER: Multi-skilled sort of?

RESPONDENT: Yes, very much so. And where you got training in a number things, like the person who is doing the initial special ed. assessment here is me as well. So we had everything from brain damaged children, to mentally handicapped children, to severe behaviour, to children with severe learning disabilities, attention deficit. I mean everything that other schools get we have too. There is no learning assistance teacher to send them too. There is nobody. You have to do all that plus know the curriculum for K to 7 and all of that...

RESEARCHER: Do you get paid extra for this?

30

RESPONDENT: 3000 dollars a year.

RESEARCHER: I mean is that what all the other teachers get? Do you get a little more because...

RESPONDENT: I get paid 3000 dollars extra a year.

RESEARCHER: Extra?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Yes... You also have to maintain a relationship with the parents and the community because if you cannot get them on board with you, you really need to work together in order to do the best that you can for the kids. So if you cannot somehow establish a relationship with parents and maintain it you are not going to get anywhere. I think that it is extremely difficult for most beginning teachers to be put in a situation like this and experience success. I think that you need to have some kind of background in life, your experience, that kind of thing.

RESEARCHER: Now that is what you said to me this morning... I am trying to remember the word that you used, you know first, when I talked to you this morning you said training was important and you said another thing, you have to be 'really dedicated'.

20 **RESPONDENT:** Yes. You have to be dedicated and you have to be self-motivated. Like if you are waiting for other people to say, "well okay this day we are going to have an assembly and we are going to have a staff meeting and this" or whatever, you are not going to make it in this kind of a setting. You have to be able to look at the situation, assess the needs, make a plan for the children and the families that are at different places in their ability to cope with things, and carry it through. So you have to be organised, self motivated, knowing that the drive is coming from you to keep all this going. There is nothing external that is making this go.

RESEARCHER: Okay. Tell me in your view what are the advantages for the children in a multi-grade classroom of this sort. What have you noted are some of the advantages for them...

30 **RESPONDENT:** I think that some of the advantages are that there is more like a family feel to what goes on as opposed to like a peer group thing. So your kids are helping each other out or providing support to each other. They will adjust the games that they are playing, if there are other kids playing so that you will keep the hockey stick down so that the little kids do not get hurt, that kind of thing. You avoid some of the peer group stuff where people are doing that grade 7 thing, you know I am big, I am cool, whatever, right. You cannot avoid it completely, but you can avoid a lot

of it.

RESEARCHER: Yes.

10 **RESPONDENT:** I think the situation, not just in the school, but by nature the relationship that involve the families and the communities helps children to learn to relate in a positive way with people of all different ages. So they are comfortable dealing with adults, with kids that are younger than themselves, with their peer groups. When I have worked in larger city schools, I have seen that that is something that often does not happen. They get very good at knowing the kind of a pecking order and you know how to get along with each other in your own age group that when it comes to dealing with people that are really separate from them in age, they do not have a lot of those skills. I mean I have been here long enough to see these kids. Also, there are kids who have graduated from high school from when I was first here and you see them, they... can just move into social situations and the community It is not like they can only clump together in their age groups or whatever.

RESEARCHER: So you see that sense of responsibility being built and care for others and that kind of thing?

20 **RESPONDENT:** Yes. I think that because we are a small school it is easier for us to decide on a plan of action and move. We make a lot of decisions on how the school is run. We make it together as a parent group and we make decisions by consensus and it is easier to do that with a smaller group, but we only have 11 families. So it is easier to sit around, everybody gets a chance to talk and if they do not we make sure like, Ayou have not said too much how do you feel about this." Come to a decision and then it is easier to get everybody moving forward because we were all there when we discussed it. So you all have some sense of ownership in it to move forward. So I think that that is another big benefit and it is one that has enabled us to do things. We have taken the kids to Ottawa. We have a cooking programme in the school. We have done sewing and stuff with the kids here. Normally, those things would not be a part of regular curriculum in another school.

30 **RESEARCHER:** Okay, other advantages of multi-grade teaching for the children specifically?

RESPONDENT: I think that there is, because in that classroom there are resources that cover the range of kindergarten to grade 7. As I have said we have a number of special needs kids now and have had over the years without being separated or being told to go with the...

RESEARCHER: It is an advantage for the SEN kids?

RESPONDENT: The resources are right there, they can be in a normal classroom with the regular kids and still access special education resources or books or things that are at a lower level without saying, "I had to go to the primary class to borrow a book because that is all I can read". It is part of their own library. So I see that as a real big part and one of the things especially is a lot of the special education kids get older where their ego was more tied up in that kind of stuff, like "whether I am behind or not." They are in a class where they are used to a lot of kids or doing a lot of different things. So if they are doing something different it does not automatically become a stigma of, "you are doing little kids work because you cannot do our work"

10

RESEARCHER: You do not have that problem at all?

RESPONDENT: No. We have not had that and we have a number of special needs kids, some who had real self-esteem problems as well and who have had difficulty in other schools and then come here and are really uptight. (They) like hide their book, they do not want anybody to see that they are doing different work. Then all of a sudden, after they have been here a while they are realising, "oh", right...

RESEARCHER: So you have had those kinds of experiences?

RESPONDENT: Yes, we have had those kinds of experiences. Then the other thing is that kids can see, I mean they see and hear everything that is going on, so there are times when they are hearing things that older kids are doing but they are ready to hear it, they are ready to connect the information and so they do. So it works in both directions.

20

RESEARCHER: So in other words, they can grasp those concepts more easily when they get to it?

RESPONDENT: Sometimes you will have a student, like right now one of my students is in grade 2 who is a really capable student and so when he hears the other kids doing times tables and divisions sets he starts to try and think about that and he goes, "I know what 10 x 10 is, it is 100". I was doing the flash cards with his older sister and now he knows what 3 x 2 is. So he is ready to hear that information, so he grabs onto it.

30

RESEARCHER: So you do not stop him or anything?

RESPONDENT: No.

RESEARCHER: Now what happens with him, for instance when you give him the grade level sums and...

RESPONDENT: That is what his regular work is.

RESEARCHER: Then when he is through with that will he like get hold of the grade 3 sums?

RESPONDENT: Yes. With him particularly in this incidence, I am giving him any written work to do, but what he likes to do is to do the flash cards because this is fun and fast to try and see how many flash cards I can get in and that kind of thing. So I let him do that.

10 **RESEARCHER:** You let him do those kinds of things?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Just the converse of that? What happens if a child is like supposed to be in grade 4 but in some areas, say maths for instance they are still lagging behind, they need to perhaps work as a grade 3 or 2 level?

RESPONDENT: We have a student like that right now who is chronologically in grade 4 but really is working at a grade 2 level and the major reason has been absence (from school). Like she has missed well over of a full school year since she started school.

20 **RESEARCHER:** So do you allow them then to do the grade 2 work if she needs that?

RESPONDENT: She works on activities that are really hitting her, where she really needs to work on her skills. For instance reading, she is reading grade 2 level reading material. In number operations she is not as far behind, so she is able to do the adding and subtracting and she is starting on... Like the rest of the grade 4's are really solidifying their multiplication and division facts. She is just getting into it... So she is not just at one level. It depends on the skill that she is working. When we get to things that are more concept-based like geometry where there is a lot of vocabulary or place value then it is taking her back and having her go through a grade 2 pace, so it really depends on...

30 **RESEARCHER:** So you do that on a one to one rather than letting her work from grade 2 sheets or that kind of thing?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Okay. Any disadvantages in terms of...?

RESPONDENT: The school does not have a lot of resources and opportunities that a larger school would have. For instance, we do not have a gym attached to our building. This year there was a recreation centre built in town and we are allowed to use it three days a week between November and April. So that has been like the first time that we have been able to do that.

RESEARCHER: You do not have some resources, why, because the size of the school or the number of children?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Because nobody built a gym here, so you do not have a gym. The way they work in our school district is at school-based management. So whatever money is sent from the funding from the government is split up to each of the schools. So we are a small school so we get a small part of it. So like...

RESEARCHER: You do not have each and every facility here. Any other disadvantages of multi-grade teaching for the children?

20 **RESPONDENT:** I think that depending on certain children and certain families there can be disadvantages like if siblings have a difficult time getting along. That becomes an issue you have to deal with at school as well, and especially when you are dealing with dysfunctional homes that really cannot provide any support or learning at home as far as like what the appropriate behaviour and all that kinds of stuff... those kids are often having difficulty with each other at home, then they are with each other 24 hours a day. We do not have that issue this year, but we have had it in the past. So surprisingly enough...

RESEARCHER: How do you cope with it?

30 **RESPONDENT:** Well, I take a really firm stand. I say, whatever is going on at home is another issue, at school these are the expectations, this is what we want, acceptable behaviour and you are going to adapt to that. Then I try to do things to help make it easier, like physically separating children, like the older brothers on this side and the younger sisters are on that side of the classroom. Helping them learn techniques like we are all coming to the group to sit down, you do not need to sit close to each other, you could choose to sit, you could consciously choose that.

RESEARCHER: I noticed you spell out your expectations all the time and you

confirm that they know it and the rules and...

RESPONDENT: Yes. It is basically...

RESEARCHER: Does that actually help you to manage the classroom better?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Yes, because most of our kids are coming to school having had very little actual parenting in terms of like an adult setting expectations and expecting those standards to be met. So often you get to school and you start right from the beginning like what is the appropriate language, a teacher is somebody you have to listen to, you are going to get direction, you are going to do things you are expected to do, you have to do it, those kind of things. So the more... you give a name to it then the kids understand. They understand okay, she is saying that she wants me to be a good friend, and what did I hear her say, wanting to tie her shoes that that means a good buddy or whatever. So they are knowing what kind of behaviour that means.

RESEARCHER: Okay. Any other disadvantages in multi-grade teaching that you found as a teacher?

RESPONDENT: I do not really think so. I mean things like when there are brothers and sisters in the same classroom and they get into trouble and if they want to get back at the brothers they will say, "guess what, so and so did today".

20 **RESEARCHER:** But is having the same children in the class also beneficial sometimes and in which way? You know you have an older brother and a younger sister in the classroom. What are some of the advantages?

RESPONDENT: Well, it is interesting because often brothers and sisters will do their own bickering and that kind of stuff, but when they get to where somebody else is involved, they stand together. There has been the very odd exception to that, but it has been extremely rare. Like almost with our exception we tell the parents, they say, "what, they are always bickering at home." That may be and the same thing holds true at the school. They can be here and people get into their bickering..., but if we go somewhere else they stand together as a group and if anybody messes with one of the kids they all come together, we move together. [laughter]

30 **RESEARCHER:** So it is like a real good team spirit in other words? ...I saw children this morning working with factors, I saw children working with multiplication...

RESPONDENT: You have seen everything just at the tail end, finishing before the

term.

RESEARCHER: I wonder if you can, in order to help me understand, just sketch for me what would happen when you are introducing for instance multiplication to the third graders. If you are starting something new, how would you do that? How would you group them, who would be doing their own work?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Okay, so what I do is, if I start something like multiplication I take all the kids that can do multiplication. So some of them may be like learning how to group, right, so this would assume that we have not done this since last year. That could be in this case, when we were doing it this year it was grades 3, 4, 5, 6. So everybody else I had given them independent things to do, things that I knew that they could do independently in their maths.

RESEARCHER: That is grade is K-2?

RESPONDENT: K-2 and grade 7.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

20 **RESPONDENT:** So all of them were doing things that I knew they could do independently. Then I keep the kids that are going to do any form or multiplication and then I start from the kids that are at the lowest end of that. So the kids were just going to be remembering from the end of grade 2 level last year, that we can group things together, you know. We have five bicycles and there are two wheels on each bicycle, this is how we can show it. So that everybody is being reminded. So it starts there. When I know that for the grade 3's... it is really just a review for them, I am going to give them their work and send them off. Then I have grades 4 to 6... The grade 4's are still only working on times tables but we are now trying to work on 12, like getting the speed up, knowing information because the next thing they are going to do is multiply with larger numbers.

RESEARCHER: Yes.

30 **RESPONDENT:** We go over that and I set up a system for them to do their work and to time each other... What I did that first day was rather than giving them a work sheet and using the clock. There are three of them in a group, one was keeping an eye on the clock for the time, the other one was holding the flash card like being the teacher, and the other one was being the student and it was like see how many they could get within a minute and one student was timing. When they did that then they move to the next kid, they changed roles, like they rotated. So while they were doing

that on the far side of the classroom where they were not interrupting us, then the grades 5 and 6's who were really multiplying with large numbers were going over. "Remember when you multiply with larger numbers, what it means when you have three numbers at the bottom. " We did several examples on the board, "oh yes, we got that". So when the kids were able to do that on the board then they were given seat work to do. Then I pulled the grade 7's out and... let me check your book, quick, "yes, everything is going fine, you keep on going and finish that. " I went back and checked the grades 1 and 2's. So what I did with the kindergarten was I had sent them to computers because they are able to do very little independently, but computers is one thing if you get them started. So then I went back to the grade 1 and 2's and they were working on addition and subtraction. In that particular case, that was the day that they finished their work, what I have given them to do was just adding and subtracting and then what I was doing at the end was just pulling them and doing the beginning of writing numbers up, adding without re-grouping but getting that column added up right.

10

RESEARCHER: Generally, is this the way you would, I mean obviously some days it may be 5, 6 and 7 and other days 1, 2 and 3 and that kind of thing. But generally this is the way you are trying to have as many grades that are new to the concept together. As you do it at different levels you send them off to do some work by themselves and then the very new concept might be for the 5, 6, 7's and then you could give it to them and then also give them independent work?

20

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: That is interesting. But yet they were all working at their grade level?

RESPONDENT: Yes... Generally, I try to get a large umbrella topic, like whether it is science or social studies or whatever, get a large umbrella topic and then break it down.

RESEARCHER: Do you mind sketching for me what you were doing with social studies... this year? ...But before you do that, what I wanted to ask you is... It means you as the teacher needs to know or needs to be very clear about what the bench marks are for the different levels?

30

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: You almost have it like in your head already?

RESPONDENT: Yes. We have, you have obviously seen the IRP's, the learning outcomes or whatever and one of the things they did when they first came out was... I mean there were big books, but at the back there is an appendix only with learning outcomes. So I went to that part and only photocopied the learning outcomes. Then I put the learning outcomes for language together for K-7 and I put it together for science for K-7. So I have it all in one place. When I am doing my planning I can look at it and say okay we are going to do a unit on under... the umbrella of families. The younger kids are talking about their own family, their family in the community, communities within their own province. The older kids are talking about First Nations communities and families... ancient civilisations, I mean different, but we have it under one umbrella so we are talking about the same kinds of things even though each level may be talking about it in a different background.

RESEARCHER: So can you sketch one of your themes that you have done in social studies, for example? Anything that you did this last term and how you started out doing it and then how you sort of follow up on it?

RESPONDENT: Okay, my mind just went blank.

RESEARCHER: [laughter] You know it is just that it is hard for me... You know I wish I could have been here for a couple of days...

RESPONDENT: [laughter]

RESEARCHER: Okay, well this term.

RESPONDENT: Okay, the latest unit that we have been working on and actually this was one that was only peculiar to the intermediate students and they were doing a unit on the Olympics because of course the Olympics had just happened and then we have seen some material I thought I like a lot of the activities...

RESEARCHER: Where does that material come from because I was looking at the files. Did it come from the provincial...?

RESPONDENT: It comes from... companies that sponsor our Olympic things, sponsored that unit being put together.

RESEARCHER: Really? Like publishing companies and so forth?

RESPONDENT: No, like BC Tell, telephone company...

RESEARCHER: They did sponsor this?

RESPONDENT: Yes. So I guess they went and did this so I liked a lot of the activities in there because they were integrated across the curriculum and they were also taking learning outcomes from across the grades, the intermediate grades. A lot of the activities were really good discussion and thinking about things like the values behind it and does every country have equal champs for doing these things, for training for winter sports or for summer sports. It led to a lot of really good discussions and...

10 **RESEARCHER:** I can imagine. What were the younger ones doing, the K-3 doing during this time? Or did you include them in the discussions as well?

RESPONDENT: Well, on some of the discussions, depending on the topic, but some of... it was above their heads. So I had them just doing something about Me, Myself, My body, stuff like that.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

RESPONDENT: We did a unit on First Aid that everybody did.

RESEARCHER: So you would do something with them and then what would you do with them while you doing the intermediate group? You know I am just trying to figure out how...

20 **RESPONDENT:** Whenever I am working with one group of kids, I always give the other group of kids something to do. I mean there are always kids that are kind of wondering and whatever, but basically the rule in our classroom is, 'you cannot be doing nothing'. If I say to them, "what are you doing right now?" I better not hear nothing. There is always something to do. The kids are actually good at that. They are pretty good going on, even if they can see that I am teaching and they need help they will either ask another student, like "do you know what this means?" Or, they will get a book to read while they are waiting for me. The kids are pretty good about that.

RESEARCHER: Yes, I noticed that.

RESPONDENT: It took a lot of training. [laughter]

30 **RESEARCHER:** Planning. This brings me to planning. When do you plan and how do you plan. I am sure you have to sit down or know the day before what you

are going to do because you need to know what you are giving them something for 15 minutes because you are going to need the 15 minutes to introduce a new concept to another group.

RESPONDENT: That is right.

RESEARCHER: How do you go about it? What do you do?

RESPONDENT: I do some general planning when I am starting each unit.

RESEARCHER: Do you do a yearly plan at all?

RESPONDENT: No.

RESEARCHER: Not in September for the year?

10 **RESPONDENT:** No, I do not.

RESEARCHER: What do you do?

RESPONDENT: For the beginning of the year I would do unit plans for the first while... not even for the first term. I basically plan, the first units that we do, I plan by myself. I do all that by myself. But then after that, before we are going to start a new unit, we talk about... I know of learning outcomes that kids have to do, but a lot of those learning outcomes can be taught within different kinds of subject areas so we will talk about, Awhat are the kind of things that we want to talk about, learn about? So the kids have input in directing...

RESEARCHER: Do you give them a topic area or what?

20 **RESPONDENT:** Like, what do you want to talk about.

RESEARCHER: That is interesting.

RESPONDENT: I mean, part of that is that I have been teaching for a long time so I can figure out... say we could do that and I know that within that you will do this and this and this and this outcome. From this subject we can work from this and this and this.

RESEARCHER: What are some of the examples they normally come up with when you ask them what they want to talk about, what they want to learn about?

RESPONDENT: Different countries, animals, rocks and minerals, dinosaurs, ranching. Ranching and farming we did a big unit on, but you know I mean in all of those things there are a lot of different kind of information that you can pull into it.

RESEARCHER: Yes, and then you would like if you did any one of those as a unit...

RESPONDENT: After I kind of agree like okay we are going to do...

RESEARCHER: Rocks and minerals?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Yes, rocks and minerals. I did a unit plan on that... and then the kids... No, that was the last time we were doing dinosaurs and you know I did a unit plan and we did all these things that... and then kids got off on fossils and rocks. Then we took a turn into...

RESEARCHER: So you do things that they want?

RESPONDENT: So it was like they were really interested, they were keen on it and we kind of just switched into this whole thing midstream and I do not have a problem with that. We are still meeting the learning outcomes, we are still doing what we need to do.

20 **RESEARCHER:** How do you go about teaching that then with the different levels? You will introduce it, but give them different tasks? Like the older ones may be working with a magnifying glass and looking for things then the younger ones may be drawing and colouring in?

RESPONDENT: One of the things we have. I do not know if you ever heard of the Private Eye? It is like a jeweler's loop.

RESEARCHER: Yes, someone mentioned that at another school.

RESPONDENT: So like if there is anything that we are doing that we can use that, I do because that is really...

RESEARCHER: They enjoy that?

RESPONDENT: Oh, they love it. It is their own personal thing, like with their fingerprint or you are looking at leaf veins or you know whatever it is. It is like up close and you start with the sketching of it, make them focus on details. Everybody

can do that, from kindergarten to grade 7 and you get a wide range of response because there is a wide range of ability within there.

RESEARCHER: Do you actually leave it up to them... to find the depth of it, or do you also probe or focus that?

RESPONDENT: Yes, I mean like some of that. They are getting some of the ownership for what they are learning, but that is not where it all rests. I am the professional who knows what they are supposed to be learning. If I see that they are really missing the boat here or they are not really getting the point I want them to get, I will step in and do some other activity... Okay, this is what we are going to focus on, this is what I want you to look for, this is what I want you to notice. So it is a combination.

10

RESEARCHER: Yes, so you will step in and re-direct if they are not working at the right level?

RESPONDENT: Yes. Like I feel like you are missing a point, you are not really getting what the point of what the exercise really is.

RESEARCHER: Okay. Thanks, that is a good point. What are some of the instructional strategies that have worked best for you then? Is it to teach the whole group and then some individualised learning for each one and then you go around and have a one to one?

20

RESPONDENT: Probably I would say that I use the most. That for me having eight grade levels out there, from kindergarten to grade 7 and take one grade at a time, by the time I can get back to any other kid it is too long in between and behaviour and attention span and everything can really crumble.

RESEARCHER: Yes. Are there times when the children get to work on a task where you have grouped them in small little groups, give them a task, let them get on with that together as a group?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Because today I saw a lot of individualised learning and I know it is the end of the term and so forth, but do you do a lot of that as well?

30

RESPONDENT: Yes we do some of that as well. For instance, we did a poetry unit in January and almost all of the poetry we did was all in small groups and it was all across grades. Like it was not like there was a grade 7 group and a grade 3 group,

it was like you might have a grade 2, a grade 5, a grade 6 in your group, you might have a kindergartner.

RESEARCHER: Is that the way you mainly group them for group work?

RESPONDENT: No, but that happened to be how we did it for poetry unit.

RESEARCHER: Do you also group them sometimes according to their grade group?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Like get them to work on something together?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Yes and especially if it is skill-based. Because we have some special needs kids, you might go on to grade 4's but I know that, you know she needs...

RESEARCHER: So in other words like ability grouping? I mean they are grouped according to what they can do?

RESPONDENT: Yes, or what they need to do like who needs to be working on this right now and who does not get fractions and need to be working on it right now. I know it is this person, this person, this person, okay I want you to come with me. Sometimes it has to do with grade groups because it is a specific learning outcome for a specific grade and sometimes it is across the grade. Also, like in art we will do that or cooking. For sure cooking we will do that or PE.

20 **RESEARCHER:** But which one would you say is the one you use most often when you get to group work? Is it according to grades, is it across grades?

RESPONDENT: It really depends on what activity.

RESEARCHER: So it is flexible?

RESPONDENT: It is very flexible. It really depends on the activity. The activity decides how it is going to be grouped.

RESEARCHER: Okay. Co-operative working amongst the children, is there a lot of that, where they sort of helping each other?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: And showing one another?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: How do you get that going? How do you foster that in other words?

RESPONDENT: It can be a little tricky, not because the kids are not working together because they like working together. What can be tricky, is getting them work together but understanding where the line is between helping explain what the child has to do and telling them the answers.

10 **RESEARCHER:** Yes.

RESPONDENT: So we have done a lot of talking around that. If you just explain to them what to do that is being a help, but if you are giving him the answers then how will we ever know that he knows how to do this or not.

RESEARCHER: So you have gone through this with them?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Because I watched someone, I think a grade 4 girl tell a grade 3 girl not to do the work for a grade 1 boy, Ado not do it for him, you are telling him what to do, then she held off and...

20 **RESPONDENT:** Yes. [laughter]

RESEARCHER: I found that quite interesting.

RESPONDENT: We talk about that very specifically. I need to know and I cannot be sitting on top of every kid every time I am moving around. I need to know that if I get to that person (and am) looking at his work, that it is his work I am seeing and not the grade 7 who did it for him.

RESEARCHER: Okay. The rules that you have, I see you reinforcing it, did the children play a part in coming up with the rules in the beginning?

RESPONDENT: At the beginning of the year, general rules for the school too which are pretty short and to the point were developed with community members,

parents, children and the staff together.

RESEARCHER: Oh really?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: All sitting together?

RESPONDENT: Yes in a circle.

RESEARCHER: That is wonderful.

10 **RESPONDENT:** ...The way that we like normally would work problems out, when kids are having a problem they come to the office and talk it out. Everybody has a chance to say, you know this is what I think and this is, from my perspective what happened to work it out. If you have a problem, tell somebody that you are having a problem, do not just like sling or push, or whatever. We have a lot of natural kind of push and shove as soon as I am not happy. So it has been an issue we really had to work on.

RESEARCHER: Okay that is good. That is very interesting. That is probably how you manage all of this.

RESPONDENT: You see now that is another thing where when you are in other schools that try and use conflict resolution too and what they do is hire a conflict resolution teacher and that teacher goes from class to class teaching the kids what to do.

20 **RESEARCHER:** How to resolve conflict?

RESPONDENT: Yes. But then the teacher is not in the room right, so there is always this breakdown between who was told what, who heard what. In this school, the person who has done all the teaching is me, the kids had all been there and heard at all at the same time. Then, every problem that we have whether it is in the classroom or on the playground is dealt with using the language that we all use. We all have common language. A common understanding of what is acceptable and how things are worked out. So I think it works easier for that reason because all the people that have to live it every day are the ones who learned it all together while we did it too.

30 **RESEARCHER:** Fascinating. That is really interesting. Active learning, activity

learning, the intermediates, do they still use active things to get maths?

RESPONDENT: Yes. That is another one of the good things like we have all the maths manipulatives in the classroom and there is no rule like only the K-3's are allowed to use them or the K-4's, we do not have enough for K-7 or whatever. They are in the classroom and whoever is having problems can go back to it to build it to see what it is that needs to happen.

RESEARCHER: Do older children sometimes abuse that? Where they want to go back to all the things that are "baby" things? You know what I mean?

10 **RESPONDENT:** They do not. They really use it... Although, I have to say that there are occasions in the school year, maybe once or twice in a school year, for whatever reason, we would have an afternoon, like a Friday afternoon and people can have free time, which means they can choose what they want to do. So some kids will go to computers. Some kids will sit in the library together and read a book with a pal. Some kids will go to the play centre and if the older kids choose to go to the play centre during that time, nothing is said.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

RESPONDENT: That is what they want to do, yes.

RESEARCHER: About twice a year you say?

20 **RESPONDENT:** Yes, not very often. It is not like I say okay, you know in the fall term or in the spring term. Whatever circumstances or...say you will have a free time afternoon... The other thing is that if we have bad weather here the children stay in, like if it is raining which does not happen very often, that is probably a few times a year, the kids can play with those things at lunch time then if they are in. Most often they do not. They would rather be on a computer or reading a book or playing chess or whatever. But every once a while you see that they do go back there and they want to do that, and if that is what they want to do, go for it. We all do what we need to do.

RESEARCHER: Okay. Is there a lot of peer tutoring where older children help the younger ones?

30 **RESPONDENT:** I do not know I would say a lot, but somehow it goes on on a regular basis, yes.

RESEARCHER: Does that happen spontaneously?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Or do you direct them to go and help someone?

RESPONDENT: Sometimes I do, but not very often. Mostly kids are pretty independent at that. Like if I am having trouble, I will go ask Bobby, because Bobby knows how to do it, Bobby can help me. Every once in a while you get a kid who is in a space where they cannot just get up, be motivated or moving. Then I will say, Bobby, I want you to go and sit with so and so and help them until I am finished over here and I will come and check on them.

RESEARCHER: So you do use that?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Yes.

RESEARCHER: Because I mean it is hard for you to get around to everybody?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: So you do sometimes specify, that someone else who is better at it, might go and help somebody else?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: That is what I want (to know) because that would make things easier.

20 **RESPONDENT:** Oh yes. Like I say mostly the kids will ask somebody else for help and the kids kind of know "if I need help with this, I could probably ask so and so and they may be able to help me."

RESEARCHER: Okay. Do you and the other lady that comes in, Vicky, do you sort of sit down and plan together or does she just fit in? How does that work? How does she know what she is supposed to do?

RESPONDENT: She basically fits in. [laughter]

RESEARCHER: She comes along with her programme?

RESPONDENT: I do the planning and before she is going to come we touch base on the phone and I say okay this is where the kids are at the different grades like this is kind of what they need to be working on and then she...

RESEARCHER: Just fits in?

RESPONDENT: Yes, she fits in.

RESEARCHER: I do not know. How are you doing for time?

RESPONDENT: Oh, I must ring the bell.

RESEARCHER: Okay, we will finish this off after school then?

RESPONDENT: Sure.

RESEARCHER: I am sure it is only about fifteen minutes or so that is left.

ADJOURNS

RESUMES

10 **RESEARCHER:** Earlier on we talked about the curriculum and you said that you have to try and make it fit in with this community because there are a lot of First Nation's children here.

RESPONDENT: Right.

RESEARCHER: Could you tell me some of the ways that you do this, taking your Primary Program curriculum or your IRP's, how do you adjust them to make them fit?

20 **RESPONDENT:** For instance, when I look at language/art, instead of using a lot of canned materials like reading series or other things that are basically published for middle class, white society, we do a lot of whole language, we do phonic instructions, but we do it from within using local material or using our own written kinds of stories, news, reports and whatever, trying to include the children's experiences, the language and the vocabulary that they understand and have meaning for them.

RESEARCHER: Like sometimes, the colloquialisms you know, people use words differently. Do you accommodate that or are you trying to make them speak proper English or what?

RESPONDENT: It depends on what we are doing. If it is just informal writing and speaking then I let them speak with some of the local quotes. I do not let them use them all because they do things that are really... I guess it is personal. So I get

to a point like personally where do you draw the line. When the kids says "I gots it", I draw the line and say, excuse me? [laughter]

RESEARCHER: Yes, that you have to.

RESPONDENT: But things like, a typical way of talking, here where people talk about going places. They go "down Litton" "up Ashcroft", "over Merritt" and they miss the connecting word that in proper English you would say, "going down to Litton" or we are going up to Ashcroft.

RESEARCHER: Right.

10 **RESPONDENT:** That is just the way it has always been said and it just seems to be that that is the phrase... So if they do that if that is what they are writing in their news for the day...

RESEARCHER: You leave it?

RESPONDENT: I leave it, yes.

RESEARCHER: Okay. That is very interesting. Your curriculum, you have different areas like language, arts, maths, do you try to integrate across the board, like say you have a unit you bring a bit of language, a bit of English, a bit of maths, a bit of social studies. Are you conscious of doing that?

20 **RESPONDENT:** Yes. With a lot of things that works that we have integrated and some things it kind of like just... You know, I cannot think of something on top of my head, but sometimes it is things like I know they need to learn and this is what we are going to do in straight language arts, or whatever...

RESEARCHER: Yes.

RESPONDENT: But certainly a lot of the times in our umbrella units that we do we have integrated...

RESEARCHER: So the unit is becoming your vehicle for integrating the curriculum?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

30 **RESEARCHER:** ...Okay. Tell me how do you go about assessing the children? I mean you are so busy, I cannot imagine where in this day you find time to observe

what John is doing or what Sean is doing and make a note of it if they have made a major break-through today. How do you do that?

RESPONDENT: You have to retain that in your head. I have a place where I keep notes, I keep some on computer and some in..., you probably saw me writing, in my day book today. I have a binder where the front part of it is a day book and the back half of it I have sub-divided by kids names so there are dividers sticking up with each child's name on it. If I (am) working with them and want to mark something down or add something like, "oh, we have been struggling with this adding and re-grouping thing and he finally got it", I will record it...

10 **RESEARCHER:** So if you have a chance you go over to your binder and you just mark it down?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: You date it?

RESPONDENT: Yes I do. Just like today 3/12 and I did that. Today, I was doing some of that in class because Vicky was here and so I was more freed up. Normally, I would do that at the end of the day. Usually I keep it in my head and then at the end of the day...

RESEARCHER: So you do make a point of sitting at the end of the day and writing down some of the important things?

20 **RESPONDENT:** Yes.

RESEARCHER: It would not be for everybody, every day, but...

RESPONDENT: No. It may be things that they are doing. It could be about something I want to make a note to the parents about. I have difficulty in trying to get homework assignments completed, you know whatever. You are working together specifically on a child's social behaviour and there has been a positive thing that I want to make sure I phone the parent, make them know, I noticed big improvement today. So, anything I need to remember.

30 **RESEARCHER:** I looked in their boxes there, they do have something like a portfolio book or they have their own binders and do they sort of file their own work throughout the year?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: They have portfolio books or something like that?

RESPONDENT: A binder where, not all the time, but at certain points through their elementary school years, they take examples of maths and language and something that they feel is important to show their parents. Something that they feel like it was a big thing to them, they felt that they learned a lot or whatever and then it is kept in a binder.

RESEARCHER: When do the parents get to see that? Do you have conferences?

10 **RESPONDENT:** The parents can come any time to see that. The parents formally come to see it and are expected to come see it at report card time. So when the report cards go out then we have time for the parents and students and me to meet to go over...

RESEARCHER: So you do that like three times a year because you do reports about three times a year?

20 **RESPONDENT:** We do reports three times a year, but the formal thing where the parents come in, in this school, is done twice. It is done in November and March. The last report goes out at the end of June and any parent who wants to come and see or talk to me or whatever can do so at that time, but it is not a requirement. I think in a lot of schools they ask parents to come in and parents come in and grade and parents that do not, you know you need to try and track them down or they may not come in. In this school everybody comes in, both in November and March! Then you can see just from today, parents drop in and check in. We do homework books where the kids go home with their homework books, I sign it, the parents supervise that their homework is being done, sign it, it comes back.

RESEARCHER: So that is the way. Are there any situations in the classroom where the children assess one another?

30 **RESPONDENT:** Very rarely, but we do it in a context, we have done it in the context of like discussing a product, right and looking at what this means. Like we had criteria starting out, okay is it neat, is it organised...

RESEARCHER: Like a group thing?

RESPONDENT: Yes. We have done a lot more self-evaluation than we have

evaluating each other's.

RESEARCHER: How do they do that? What system do you use?

10 **RESPONDENT:** It depends on the activity. Like there are documents within the Primary Program that we start out by using, and... dove-tail it to our needs, but it depends on the kind of activity and it also depends on the age of the student. The older students will respond in written form and the younger students, who have a hard time with reading... It will be like, say they were doing an activity work, like listening to a buddy read a book you know, "Was I facing the person reading?" and then there was a happy face or a sad face. "Were my eyes on the person?"... "Were my ears listening?"...depending... I mean it can also be other things like projects that they have done. "Were they looking at whether they used the research materials that we talked about?" "Did they cover the areas they were supposed to, for older kids?" But whatever it is, with the older kids it usually is a written response: "How did you feel about (it)?" "What did you learn", "What do you think you got most out of this", that kind of thing.

RESEARCHER: I think I have seen most of it, but just to get it from you. How do you find the peer relationships between the older and younger children and the interaction both inside the school and outside, like we saw at the gym now. Do they work quite well together?

20 **RESPONDENT:** Most of the time they do. We have some days that are worse than others and we have a number of children who struggle with a lot of issues in their life and they come to school or something happens that sets them off. It can be really hard to really kind of get them back on track. One of things that I noticed was when the kids came back in this afternoon there were already problems. Something went on out on the playground and already at the porch, I could see that (something) was going on and the people were sniping at each. So sometimes there is more of that than other times. Basically, I think the kids get along pretty well together and are pretty respectful of each other.

30 **RESEARCHER:** Yes, I saw that. I was amazed at how the older children, like your grades 6 and 7 children play with them so well. You would not get that in a city school.

RESPONDENT: No.

RESEARCHER: They would not want to be seen dead with them?

RESPONDENT: No. And those sort of things I was referring to before about when you get kids or you are just playing with their peers and they want to be cool or whatever and it is not cool to be... with little kids...

RESEARCHER: Here, they seem so well adjusted to that, I mean I watched.

10 **RESPONDENT:** ...I think... an advantage of that kind of grouping is that it is normal for kids to be interacting with people of all different ages, including the adults when they are also a part of us. So you get that kind of easy mixing of ages because you would see the same thing I have had people who will come here to visit for instance, at Christmas concerts or whatever, who would say the same thing, "I was not even sure which kid belonged to which parent" because it is like the kid's crying or wants something they will go to (any) adult and they say, "I was not even sure which kid was with which adult" and that is the kind of easy relationships that there are.

RESEARCHER: I see that. Do you have any special needs children in this classroom?

RESPONDENT: Yes. I have children with fatal alcohol syndrome...

RESEARCHER: Because nothing was quite...

20 **RESPONDENT:** This school year I do not have any mentally handicapped or brain injured children, this year. I have foetal alcohol syndrome and I have a student who has attention deficit disorder. He kind of goes on and off medication and so the kind of days that he has really depends on where he is.

RESEARCHER: Little Dylan, I noticed you focus a lot on him. Is there any reason for that?

RESPONDENT: No, it could have just been... He is a child who is Mavoureen's son and has really been (allowed) to do whatever he wants and that kind of thing so he comes into the school system and he has issues with behaviour, like he can be inappropriately physical with other children...

RESEARCHER: Oh really?

RESPONDENT: In this particular situation the only reason he has not been beaten to a pulp is because the older kids... will say "hey, cut it out".

30 **RESEARCHER:** Yes.

RESPONDENT: But you really do have to watch him. As far as academically, he has no difficulty... If he gets very far away from you his behaviour goes downhill pretty fast.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

RESPONDENT: I probably do not even think about it any more because I am used to it. The same thing with Brandon who is in kindergarten, it is the same kind of a situation. So he needs to be watched.

RESEARCHER: I saw that with him a couple of times today.

RESPONDENT: Yes.

10 **RESEARCHER:** The parents and their support for this school and this kind of teaching, how do you find that? Are they very supportive?

RESPONDENT: I feel like that they are very supportive, but I think that part of that because they have a lot of control in how the school is run.

RESEARCHER: Oh, they do?

RESPONDENT: Because we make the decisions together, the major decisions. Obviously, I am the person with the experience and the professional knowledge as far as making decisions about how they are learning, reading and writing..., but when it comes to like decisions about how we do things and the way we are going to do things... that we make those together.

20 **RESEARCHER:** And that works well? You do not have any conflict with them trying to tell you what, you know?

RESPONDENT: No, but there has been a history of problems with the community in the past.

RESEARCHER: Really?

RESPONDENT: (It) was very deeply divided between the native and the non-native community and there were a lot of racial problems when I first came here...

RESEARCHER: Really?

RESPONDENT: And it was terrible. I mean there were really terrible things that went on and...

RESEARCHER: Did you help solve that?

RESPONDENT: Yes, I would say so. When I first came here most of the native parents, if not all of them, I think we had one native parent who would come to the school, none of the rest would. If we wanted to meet with them, we had to go to the Band office. The non-native people were very like 'we are up here and you are down there' kind of a thing. We had some really rough times, times that I was not even sure I would survive because I just...

10 **RESEARCHER:** Really? It was at the beginning of your...?

RESPONDENT: It was at the beginning when I came here. Then, it came to a head fairly quickly and the superintendent basically called a meeting of the parents. He talked to each of the parents on the phone. The parents were very honest with him on the phone, then he came to a meeting and said this is what the parents said to me and they went, "Oh no, we are not prejudice, there is no problem here". Then the superintendent said, I am not asking you what the problem is, I already did that, I am telling you what I was told and you know this has to stop, the attacks on the school. For you are saying, no this is not going to happen here, there is going to be a different standard, either that has to stop or we will shut the school down, remove the children
20 and the staff and put them somewhere else. There will be no more school in your community. I think that helped I think that just time in seeing that even though the native community did not like it, the non-native community did like it at first seeing that it was fair. It was not like all of a sudden the Indians were treated better than the whites. It was, there is one standard. This is the way we are going to do it, this is the way...

RESEARCHER: They would all have problems if the school closes down.

RESPONDENT: That is right. There was kind of okay, we could see, Shelly, she will let everybody come in, everybody gets an equal say, everybody gets... and so over the time I think that partly helped. Also, there were just two or three really key
30 people who made a lot of trouble at the beginning and they have left the community and that has helped too.

RESEARCHER: Sometimes it is just certain personalities that can cause so much nonsense.

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: It is unbelievable.

RESPONDENT: Well, I could not believe that that kind of stuff went on, I could not believe some of the things that was said to me.

RESEARCHER: Yes, that is always difficult...

RESPONDENT: I mean I grew up in a white, middle-class neighbourhood. I went to a university that probably would have been classified the same way. No instruction was ever given like how do you deal with this.

RESEARCHER: How do you deal with that kind of concept?

10 **RESPONDENT:** And all of a sudden it is like...

RESEARCHER: Like you have to deal with the multi-grades. [laughter]

RESPONDENT: Yes. And I think part of it is when you are living in a white, middle-class kind of environment, even if you feel like you are not very prejudiced, you still have the concepts.

RESEARCHER: And the values and the norms...

RESPONDENT: Right. You think well, the native people were very nice to me, were very supportive of me and so you know I did not have any problems getting along with them, but there were still some ideas back here that I heard or whatever that I had to kind of get rid of too, you know.

20 **RESEARCHER:** It really is. I think you are coping quite well. When I walked into this North Park school there was a policy on the board in big print I do not know, but something... a racial policy?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Is there such a thing?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: That is probably what I saw I was thinking you know, it is specific about what you must do. It does not just say it is there and... that is what

happens with a lot of policies. It is just a nice word or a slogan because it is not happening, but this policy, the way it is worded it calls you to action... [laughter] I should get a copy of it, it was so interesting.

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Okay, parent involvement. What are some of the ways that they get involved in this school? I know about the fundraising, somebody told me about it, the parents group, I think?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

10 **RESEARCHER:** And then I saw Hazel come in and sit with her child for quite a while.

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Is that something that happens commonly? Or from time to time?

RESPONDENT: From time to time. Hazel is trying to take a computer course, but not very many people in our community would have access to computers. So, she comes here to practice.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

20 **RESPONDENT:** You know Mavourney needed to access the internet so she comes here to do that. She helps with the Christmas concerts that we do, plays and singing that kind of stuff, she helps to direct.

RESEARCHER: Oh.

RESPONDENT: You know the parent group does not just do the fundraising. We need to discuss issues.

RESEARCHER: Decision-making as well?

30 **RESPONDENT:** Decision-making. Field trips, like yesterday when I was gone to the funeral the kids were going to a Band School for sports day and there were two or three parents who went along. When we went to Ottawa, now we are probably going to Alberta. When we go on those trips there are a lot of parents, like seven to ten parents will go with us. You know at Christmas concert, everybody does

something. You are either helping with costumes or helping with back drops or prepare goodies for the tea afterwards or... You know, somebody gets the tree, everybody does something.

RESEARCHER: None of your parents are concerned about the multi-grade?

RESPONDENT: In this particular situation we have a bus that comes to our community that goes both to Ashville* and to Litton.

RESEARCHER: They bring children from there?

10

RESPONDENT: No, they do not bring students from there but they take children to... for high school. So if your child is in elementary and you do not want them to be in a multi-age classroom, you can send them either direction.

RESEARCHER: Oh. Do some children go there then?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Okay.

RESPONDENT: Oh yes, because I mean it is pretty standard here that...

RESEARCHER: But at Ashville* the school is also, I mean, multi-grade?

RESPONDENT: They have for some of the classes, yes.

RESEARCHER: One thing that I wanted to ask you... How large is this community?

RESPONDENT: About 100, 150 if you take the outlying area.

20

RESEARCHER: People?

RESPONDENT: Yes. [laughter]

RESEARCHER: I thought families. So that is where you draw your children from?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: I could see it is small, but I mean...

RESPONDENT: There are only a couple of kids who really live within a reasonable walking distance. There are not enough kids, the district will not run a bus. I mean we are on major high ways here and the kids are young and may be almost three miles and so especially for the kids coming from the reserve, the native kids, you are walking most of that way down a highway that has no edges, just the two lanes and there are no houses...

RESEARCHER: How do they get here?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Their parents usually drive them. Yes, which is interesting because if they wanted to they could just let the bus get them and take them up to Ashville* or Litton, so the parents are driving as opposed to putting them on a bus.

RESEARCHER: That is interesting.

RESPONDENT: Everybody has different... You know there are advantages and disadvantages no matter what the system you work in and it is a matter of each family deciding which advantages and disadvantages are important to them.

RESEARCHER: Okay. This really is the last question. You have not taught in single-grade schools, have you?

RESPONDENT: I taught in schools that have single grades. It just happened that the assignments that I got were never for single grades.

20 **RESEARCHER:** Okay. I am just asking you for an opinion here. Do you think that the children in your classroom, in terms of their cognitive development, you know how they learn...

RESPONDENT: Intellectually.

RESEARCHER: ...whether they are progressing as well as they would have had they been in a single-grade class? Do you think that they are getting enough out of this thing, cognitively. When they leave you, are they ready for high school? I mean you are able to see that because you have seen the kids go on to high school and how they have done there.

30 **RESPONDENT:** Most of the kids in this community come from really high-at-risk homes. I have a large number of kids whose parents have died and all kinds of things

going on, so that obviously affects part of... If you look at the kids who are not in the high risk category then I would say that we have a pretty good level of academic standing because most of the kids have gone on to be on the Honour Roll, when they have gone to the town (high school).

RESEARCHER: Really?

RESPONDENT: We have had two kids that have gone from this school on to the high school at Ashville*, that have won the Governor-General's award.

RESEARCHER: Really?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Which is really a high reward. So I would say that the kids that have to work hard to get C's here are the same kids that have to work hard to get C's in Ashville*. We have kids who have had higher abilities than that and have done well when they have gone to town schools. We have kids that really struggle here and anywhere else too. Actually, I think that for probably most of the kids, whether they were here or there, would have done around the same. Probably the only kids that have made a difference one way or the other is the really high at risk kids that have actually done better here than in town because it is smaller, because all the communication is faster, providing the support is faster, it is just easier. The larger the system the easier it is for kids to kind of fall through the cracks sometimes.

20 **RESEARCHER:** And in the domain of their non-cognitive development, looking at the psycho-social aspects, self esteem and...?

RESPONDENT: I would say they probably do better here.

RESEARCHER: Why? What are some of the examples that you have observed?

RESPONDENT: I think that in this kind of a situation the kids have to learn fairly young how to accept responsibility for themselves and their learning. How to get along with others even if they are different. If there is only one of you in grade 1 then you have to learn how to get along with kids at a different level. If you are the only girl in grade 6 then you have to be able to learn how to get along with boys and girls without getting in that, "eek, yukkie" stuff.

30 **RESEARCHER:** What are some of the ways that this enhances their sense of self-esteem and self-worth?

RESPONDENT: I think that because you are not dealing with peers, that the kids are often quicker to cheer each other on, not just like if you are the popular kid or

whatever. Not that it happens all the time but I certainly see it a lot. Or, when kids are feeling down or upset about something that has gone on at home, you will see somebody else sitting with them in the cloak room with the hand on the back and patting them and... it is going to be okay or whatever. There is a lot positive reinforcement, a lot of listening that goes on that I do not think necessarily goes on in the peer group. Maybe between friends and you know in a close group, but not necessarily going on. Then it is still okay to do that. One thing that I can remember from when I was teaching at larger schools is that when boys get to a certain age, singing was no longer cool.

10 **RESEARCHER:** Yes. My son dropped out of piano lessons.

RESPONDENT: [laughter] Yes. It is just like you know boys of this age, that is not a cool thing to do. One of the things that I noticed, with Christopher just coming back from a city school, he has that in him, like "I am too cool for that." But Sean that has been here since he was in grade 3, he just gets right into the thick. If he was out there, in Ashville* in a soccer team or whatever, he would not go around singing because that would not be cool with the guys up there, but here in this environment he does it and he enjoys it and he practices.

20 **RESEARCHER:** I was listening to you read the Arabian Knights. Okay, so if they do not want to listen they do not have to. But how often at that age... I still enjoy listening to a story.

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: And it builds both your listening skills, you know...

30 **RESPONDENT:** It builds the listening skills. It builds attention and focusing, and also is adding to their store of knowledge because these children with the exception of places that school has taken them, rarely have been outside of this community. Most of them, almost all of them have not been read to at home. So the only literature base they have is what they have had at school and then when you start talking about like trying to build language like writing stories or anything, you have to put stuff in there before you can get stuff out! It is actually interesting. In this community the kids are not predominantly TV watchers, they are predominantly outside playing kids.

RESEARCHER: Oh that is great. That is nice. [laughter] That is it mainly. Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW

**SCHOOL 3 DANZAR PARK*, BRITISH COLUMBIA
INTERVIEW WITH PARENT - MRS M WREN***

12 MARCH 1998

RESEARCHER: You have two children at this school?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: What are their ages and what grades are they in?

RESPONDENT: Dylan is almost 7, in grade 1 and Sarah is 9 years and she is in grade 4.

10 **RESEARCHER:** As a parent, what is your attitude towards both of them being in the same class? Being - different levels, different ages, different grades?

RESPONDENT: I think it is great. I really like it.

RESEARCHER: You like it?

RESPONDENT: Yes. It really helps them with their team work, helping each other out. The closeness and it is also good for me just to know that sitting around the supper table, you know what (they) were doing at school today. You know that they can kind of, you know it is not telling on each other as such, but it is also a praising each other.

RESEARCHER: Sharing?

RESPONDENT: That is right. Sharing, hearing it from all sides.

20 **RESEARCHER:** They do not complain? Like Sarah does not complain at home, you know, "oh, I have babies in my classroom..." and that kind of thing?

RESPONDENT: No, not at all. Probably, she started kindergarten herself so she knows nothing else. It is all she knows. This is her fifth year in this situation with the same teacher.

RESEARCHER: And around discipline issues, your opinion obviously as a parent, you do not know what is going on all day. But do you find with discipline that it is easier in this environment or more difficult than if they were like grade 4 separately and kindergarten separately, you know in separate grades?

* Pseudonym

RESPONDENT: I have never thought about it. I do not know if it is an issue. From what I have seen if there is a discipline issue happening they are sent for time out into to the hall each and at any level and...

RESEARCHER: Okay.

RESPONDENT: Discipline is expected of them, depending on their age.

RESEARCHER: But what you are saying from the first part that you told me was that you have actually seen greater sharing and co-operativeness at home?

RESPONDENT: Absolutely.

RESEARCHER: Tell me a little more about that?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Well, I know there is a lot more sharing and co-operation in the class as well. I know that... And other schools that are not multi-grade classes do this. They say, Athe grade 4 class will go to the kindergarten class and help them with their reading or something like that. But here it is just natural, it just falls in. The intermediates pick a primary and help them with... whatever it is.

RESEARCHER: Oh, really?

20 **RESPONDENT:** And the younger children also know they can go to an older one say, Ahow do I get into this programme on the computer, John... Yes. And they also feel with the learning as well that the younger students will take more than what has perhaps offered them had they only been... Do you know what I am trying to say?

RESEARCHER: Than in a single-grade class.

RESPONDENT: That is right. So because they are all being taught together sort of with one unit, the theme is bodies, learning about the bodies and the younger children would take more than what they have been offered otherwise, something that would have been appropriate for an older level.

RESEARCHER: Right.

RESPONDENT: Because they are capable of taking that knowledge, they take that and absorb, the function of the kidneys. When they are in kindergarten they will tell you what the function of your kidneys are.

30 **RESEARCHER:** Yes. They have the opportunity to learn more even if...

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: And be challenged a little more.

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: You do not think it is boring for the grade 4 child to sometimes sit through an instruction for K's or just through a story like I saw this morning... are they are not getting bored? Are they enjoying it just as much?

RESPONDENT: I think so.

RESEARCHER: Like story-time at the beginning.

10 **RESPONDENT:** ...the story. Again and everyone takes out what they are capable of taking up and the kindergarten children can also get bored because maybe it is going above their heads in some cases. I am not sure what was read this morning, but "Widow of Danzar Park " is actually an adult book and you know that has been read and different children will take out what they can from it.

RESEARCHER: I like that answer. What do you as the parent see are the advantages of multi-grade schooling for your children? Can you list them, what are some of the advantages? I think you have mentioned some of it.

20 **RESPONDENT:** That is right. I think I have mentioned the sharing, I think being the number one, the sharing and co-operating. I see it as an advantage because this is a small school, which happens to be multi-grade. If you were still looking at a school of 400 students and turn that into multi-grade then some of the benefits that I see here would not longer apply.

RESEARCHER: Right.

RESPONDENT: Just because of the whole social scene, a gang thing, anything like that. For socialising I think...

RESEARCHER: You think this is more conducive to socialising?

RESPONDENT: Yes, because it is nice. I mean in life we were never all put all together in the same age level, are we, so we need to mix a few levels.

30 **RESEARCHER:** That is right. Do think that prepares them better for the world of life? I mean when you go into a school with the teaching staff, there are going to be older and younger teachers

RESPONDENT: Absolutely. You do not always get the same level. The life of this class there are brothers and sisters, and sisters and brothers, quite a few out of 18 children, there is probably 5 families. It is a good family sense too where brothers are helping... siblings are helping each other out.

RESEARCHER: One another.

RESPONDENT: Yes, absolutely.

RESEARCHER: And modelling also for the younger ones.

RESPONDENT: Yes. Good and bad. [laughter]

RESEARCHER: Any disadvantages that you perceive?

10 **RESPONDENT:** Umh. I am sure there are. ...perhaps older children, once they go into the upper grade levels perhaps they do not have the same stretch. I have only seen the younger levels. This is new to me too. My perspective is from my own children.

RESEARCHER: Right.

RESPONDENT: So grade 4, maybe perhaps in grade 6, grade 7 they are not stretched, do not get the challenge that the younger ones would get.

20 **RESEARCHER:** Okay. That is interesting. On the social domain, you know, the psycho-social aspects of the development, the non-cognitive side, you know the self esteem, the sense of responsibility, the sense of confidence, independence, do you think this kind of environment is more conducive to those kinds of things?

RESPONDENT: I do not know if I could say that for sure.

RESEARCHER: Like if older kids are taking care of younger ones...

RESPONDENT: It certainly is a sense of responsibility. Yes, I think that perhaps if it is a smaller school.

RESEARCHER: And if somebody gets the opportunity to show the younger person something, there are a lot of opportunities for the older ones to do that?

30 **RESPONDENT:** Yes, I suppose that will be. And also with the teacher being involved, having to say... There is a lot of independent study while the teacher is involved in one on one with other levels.

RESEARCHER: And you think that is?

RESPONDENT: That would be beneficial to the actual building of self-esteem and independence.

RESEARCHER: Yes. Okay, so the way the teacher manages the class, are you happy and comfortable with that?

RESPONDENT: I am yes. I am just happy with how it is going.

RESEARCHER: Right. They are progressing well like in all domains, of developmentally, emotionally and health wise?

RESPONDENT: I think so.

10 **RESEARCHER:** Do the parents in this school get involved in any way?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Are you on the Parents Committee or something?

RESPONDENT: Well, it is the Parent Group. Because the school is so small it basically consists of all parents or all the mothers anyway I suppose.

RESEARCHER: What are some of the things you do, get involved in the school with?

RESPONDENT: The field trips and fundraising and...

RESEARCHER: Yes.

20 **RESPONDENT:** Yes, field trips and fundraising I suppose. I get quite involved with the Christmas bazaar and sometimes the spring production as well, with the drama. It is very comfortable. As you saw this morning, I came in to use the computer.

RESEARCHER: Do you do that for...?

RESPONDENT: For myself. There is another parent who is trying to get her typing skills up and she comes in and plays on the computer occasionally and it is very open for parents to come and go, and they do.

RESEARCHER: A place to come to as well?

RESPONDENT: That is right.

RESEARCHER: Do the parents ever come and help watch the kids in class or help them with reading or anything?

RESPONDENT: Only if there is something special, like for instance, when we were doing the Christmas bazaar, doing theatre, doing show, they have lines to rehearse, poems to practice. Parents will then come in and help with their memorising and with the costumes and set-building and all that sort of thing.

RESEARCHER: Not with helping them with academic work at all?

RESPONDENT: Not generally, no.

10 **RESEARCHER:** I think the teacher union does not allow that or something?

RESPONDENT: I do not know.

RESEARCHER: Yes, I think they do in some... Anything else that you want to say about multi-grade? My research is looking at how kids learn in multi-grade classrooms and how we can improve our practice back at home because we are forced to have multi-grade schools and it is not going to go away because we do not have resources, enough teachers, enough buildings. So we have to look at some ways in which they are teaching here that is going to make it easier back at home. Do you think that getting parents more involved makes running of the school easier, the parents support...

20 **RESPONDENT:** I think there is a fair bit of support here, they do, they give their support. I think that if Shirley needed anything she knows she can call upon us. I am sure. Yes, but I think she is doing an excellent job.

RESEARCHER: What would you say is the key to her success in the classroom? What do you think is the thing that makes her manage so well?

RESPONDENT: Alright, calm. She is very calm and as well able to just... She has to put up with an incredible level of volume say as different groups are working on different things throughout the classroom and anybody who needs to have a classroom absolute hush, quiet, would not be able to.

RESEARCHER: Function.

-30 **RESPONDENT:** No, because it is just the way it is. I cannot see how it could be otherwise. Yes, it is the calm and patience, which of course probably every teacher should have is being calm and patient, but...

RESEARCHER: And flexible.

RESPONDENT: Yes and organised of course as well, which is a very important because obviously she has lesson plans for eight different levels every day. Know what she is doing for that many levels, yes.

RESEARCHER: That is good. That is great. Thanks so much. I appreciate the few minutes that you have had...

RESPONDENT: You are welcome.

10 **END OF INTERVIEW**

ANNEXURE C

Observation Schedule

OBSERVATION SCHEDULES

A. PLANNING THE OBSERVATION

Design

1. **Describe the context.** Physical context, date, time and environment.
2. **Describe the participants.** No., ages, gender, ethnicity, physical description, clothes.
3. **Describe the observer.** Anything which may affect how things are observed. e.g. my role as an evaluator of teacher education in the past may create a bias.
4. **Describe the actions.** What are they doing; describe verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Coding may be needed to aid observation, e.g. 3c for curriculum.
5. **Interpret the situation.** What does the situation mean to participants or the observer?
6. **Consider alternative explanations.** Consider the situation from different perspectives and various reasons for possible conclusions.

Explore own feelings

Reflexive analysis always plays a role in qualitative research. Consider and interpret own feelings as these may affect how and what is reported.

Advantages and disadvantages

Always consider the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade teaching. Consider how it would compare with single grade classrooms.

B. STRUCTURED OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

To be noted early on during the observation.

2. **Context:** describe the physical and social context of the school. E.g. rural/urban[2d]; financial status; resources[2e]; cultural context[5], home language, language spoken, language of instruction[2l].

The children[2h] : description; physical appearance; demeanour.
Number: of children
Gender : no. of boys and girls
Ages[2b] : age range; no. of children of each age
Grades[2a]: combinations in class; no. of children per grade
Special needs[8]: no. of children with special needs
Type: identification of their special needs

Teacher[2i]: age; gender; description appearance; demeanour; local?
Ethnicity: teacher/ children; what is the majority group
Class[2e]: physical description; general condition; cleanliness; space; size; appearance; posters; pictures.
Furniture: kind, quantity and quality; sufficient for number of children?
Equipment: general appearance and condition; types; adequate in number and relevance?; bought or made, i.e. any improvisation
Materials: same as above
Support[2g]: teaching aid/assistant

C. SEMI-STRUCTURED SCHEDULE

3. Organisation and Management of the Multigrade Classroom

3 (a) **Space and physical environment**

How is the physical space in the classroom utilised? What are the ways in which the physical environment has been arranged? How are the desk/tables arranged? Is it fixed or flexible? Where is the teacher's station? Is there enough space for the equipment? Does this arrangement appear to work well? Do the children have easy access to one another, the equipment and the teacher? Does the teacher spend most of her time at her station or does she move around the classroom? Describe this. Are there areas for quiet activities?

3 (b) **Children**

3 (b)(i) - **GROUPING**; Observe how are the children organised for the different activities during the day? What are the ways in which they are grouped and how well do these appear to work? During the interview, clarify issues.

3 (b)(iii) - **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**; How are these children accommodated and catered for? How do they interrelate with the other children?

3(b)(iv) - **DISCIPLINE**; How is discipline handled in this kind of environment? Are there any indications of developing self-discipline among learners? How do learners respond to class or group rules? How does the teacher manage these situations?

3 (c) **The Curriculum**

3 (c)(i) - **WHAT KIND OF CURRICULUM**; Is it a specific multigrade curriculum? Has the teacher or faculty devised their own curriculum or do they use an external curriculum? How has the curriculum been adapted to suit the multigrade class?

3 (c)(iv) - **RELEVANCE TO LOCAL CONTEXT**; How does the curriculum reflect the community and environment in which the child lives? How does it reflect their language, culture and values? Note any steps the teacher has taken to make the curriculum more meaningful to these children.

3 (c)(v) - **INTEGRATION OF CURRICULUM**; How is the curriculum presented to the children? Are the different subjects taught discretely or are they integrated across content or subject areas? Are they integrated through the programmes, for instance?

3 (d) **Materials**

3 (d)(i) - **WHAT MATERIALS ARE USED**; Have there been any attempts to improvise on the materials? How do the materials cater for children of differing ages and grades?

3 (d)(ii) - **HOW ARE THEY USED;** Describe how these materials are used in the multigrade classroom. What kinds of adaptations of the materials have been made for multigrade teaching? What happens when an older child works with materials that are meant for much younger children? What happens when younger children want to try out equipment or materials for the older grades? Is there evidence of cooperation amongst the children when they use materials i.e. are they working together and sharing the material.

3 (e) **Assessment**

3 (e)(i) - **WHAT, HOW, WHY, WHEN;** Is there evidence of continuous assessment? Is the teacher observing the children and recording her observations? If yes, what is being assessed? How often does she appear to do this during the period of the observation? What other methods of assessment is she using? Who and when is she assessing? Is there any evidence of peer or group assessment?

3 (e)(ii) - **RECORDING;** When and how does she record her observations or assessment?

4. Teaching method

4 (a) **Philosophy and approach**

4 (a)(i) - **LEARNER-CENTRED;** What evidence is there of a learner-centred approach? Elaborate, by describing the teaching approach? What teaching philosophy does the teacher appear to follow? How does she go about determining what the learner's needs are? Describe the apparent impact of the teaching approach on the children? Do they demonstrate independence or are they dependent on the teacher? Are they responsible and motivated? Do they approach their work with interest and enthusiasm? Do they appear to have a good self-esteem? Do they display confidence in themselves and their work? Do they appear to be happy to do their work? How are children involved in the teaching and learning that happens in the classroom? How is the instruction designed to meet the needs of both older and younger children? Describe any challenging activities that meet the needs of the older children. What about the children with special educational needs? How are their needs being met? [Make notes of the things which need to be clarified in the interview later.]

4 (a)(ii) - **CO-OPERATIVE AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES;** Describe the classroom environment. Where in the classroom does the teacher spend most of her time? Is the teacher at the front teaching or does the teacher move from learner to learner or group to group? How do the children interact with one another? In which way do the children participate in the learning process? If possible, observe and describe one particular group for a while to comment on the effectiveness of the co-operative and participatory approaches. [In a co-operative approach children should work together in a group on "...a clearly assigned collective activity without direct and immediate supervision from the teacher." (Veenman 1995: 373).

- 4 (a)(iv) - **ACTIVE LEARNING;** Describe some of the things that learners do in the classroom.
- 4 (b) **Instructional strategies**
- 4 (b)(i) - **GROUPINGS;** How are the children grouped for activities? How does this affect the instruction/teaching method? Describe how the teacher teaches different things to the different groups. How much time is spent on whole class teaching in relation to group teaching?
- 4 (b)(ii) - **PEER TUTORING;** Observe whether there are times when the children teach one another? Describe what appears to be the effect of grouping. How does the teacher appear to respond to this method? Is she comfortable with it or does she feel she has to use this method. Does she appear to be concerned about it?
- 4(b)(iii) - **SELF-DIRECTED STRATEGIES;** Do the children work by themselves during the day in self-directed activities. How do they go about this? What materials do they use for this purpose? How do the younger children respond to this method?
- 4 (b)(iv) - **INDIVIDUAL TEACHING;** What does the teacher do when the children may need individual attention or instruction?
- 4 (b)(v) - **LEARNING CENTRES;** These may or may not be a feature of the classroom. If there are any, describe how they are a part of the teachers instruction method?
- 4 (b)(vi) - **TEAM TEACHING;** Is team teaching apparent? Do the teachers at the school utilise this method? Does it appear to be effective? How?
- 4 (c) **Attitudes towards multigrade**
- 4 (c)(i) - **OF THE TEACHER;** What is my observation of the teacher's attitude towards multigrade teaching? How does she appear to respond to it? Is she positive, comfortable, concerned, overworked, resentful or negative? Establish reasons for this.
- 4 (c)(iii) - **CHILDREN;** Describe the children's attitude to being in a class with other children from different grades and of differing ages?
- 4 (d) **Peer relationships**
Describe how the children interact with one another? Which age group appears to be helping others more? Do the older children help the younger children? Do more competent children help others irrespective of age? Are the older children helping all the time so that the younger children are becoming too dependent on them? Are there sufficient activities to challenge the older children?

5. Parent and Community Involvement

What evidence is there of any parent support. For example, during the observation, have any of the parents visited the classroom or assisted the teacher.

9. Findings -observed effects on the children

- 9 (a) **COGNITIVE;** Describe any observed cognitive or academic impact of multigrade teaching on the children. What are the reasons for making these observations?
- 9 (b) **NON-COGNITIVE/PSYCHO-SOCIAL;** How does the multigrade classroom appear to impact on the children socially and emotionally? Describe how they relate to others. Do they appear to be happy and motivated? What are the indicators to substantiate this observation? Observe their attitudes towards themselves, their peers and their school. Describe their personal and social adjustment. (Veenman 1995 : 367)

ANNEXURE D

Sample of Observation Field-notes

OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES

SCHOOL 4 - DANZAR PARK, BRITISH COLUMBIA

MS LAWSON'S CLASS: K-grade7

12 DECEMBER 1998

Time: 08h45 to 14h45

No. of children: 18

Kindergarten: 4

Grade 1: 1

Grade 2: 3

Grade 3: 2

Grade 4: 3

Grade 5: 2

Grade 6: 1

Grade 7: 2

CONTEXT

- Small rural community about an hours drive from Kamloops.
- Population: (150 people)

SCHOOL

- One-roomed school consisting of 1 teacher and 18 children from ages 5 to 13. (See photo)

CLASSROOM

- Even though teacher says not many resources, the classroom appears to be well-resourced.
- The teacher has an office and a store room.
- The classroom is spacious, colourful, warm and pleasant.
- Layout is flexible – table and chairs.
- There are 5 computers, a fantasy area, book corner and creative activity area.

- There are smaller chairs and lower table for kindergartners.
- This appears to be an area for them although the older children appear to use any part of the classroom.
- This half of the classroom has novilon flooring in case there are spills with painting cooking etc.
- The other part of the classroom is carpeted.

TEACHER

- Acts as principal as well – known as a head teacher.
- Has been at the school for 12 years and has 20 years of multigrade teaching experience.
- A part- time teacher aide comes in to assist for two mornings a week (Thursdays and Fridays).

CHILDREN

- There are siblings in the class.
- One family had three children in the class:
 - A boy in grade 2
 - A girl in grade 5
 - A boy in grade 7

Activity: Whole group – small groups - language

- Ms Stone in rocking chair. Children are gathered on carpet. Talk about some of the things that happened to them yesterday.
- Someone fetches a book for reading.

- Teacher says: “Once everyone comfortable, then stay parked.”
- Five minutes for sharing experiences such as an outing to Skeetcheson yesterday.
- A child shares.
- An older child puts up hand and teacher doesn’t see him. He looked bored during the session.

Diagram of classroom layout – (see chapter 4 of thesis)

Whole group together, each group receives instructions.

Then they go off in small groups to do assigned work.

- The intermediates (grade 4-6) are doing the ‘Olympics’ as a theme.
- The teacher reminds them that they need to look at the definition – what are definitions? (e.g. definition for depth)
- “Look at dictionary – choose the right one for this.”
- Older boy asks questions.
- Intermediates move off with their work. Each one collects a dictionary to work with.
- Language exercise is given to grades 1 and 2
- The intermediate boys appear to sit separate from girls when they work
- A primary child goes and sits with two intermediate girls
- Even though there are two sections to classroom, they sit and work together in mixed groups.
- While intermediate and primary children are working, they are mixed at tables.
- Three K’s are sitting on floor, approximately 1.5m, from nearest group of 2 intermediates and 1 primary child.

- They are listening to recorded music and singing together with teacher assistant
- It's a language tape – using the 'k' 'c' sounds.
- Others continue with their work – they do not appear distracted.
- The older children come to show the teacher their work.
- She stops to check.
- She asks the kindergartners to sit where they are while she goes and gets something for an older child.

Clearly defined expectations

- Here too, as was observed Ms Stone's class at school-1, the teacher always makes them know her expectations.
- She then confirms with them whether they know and understand the instruction, even if it is only that they must sit still in their chairs.
- When children are unco-operative they are reminded to "check their attitude". Told to clean up after themselves.
- An older child who has completed the exercise comes and watches for a while – actually wants to show his/her exercise to the teacher.
- When the support teacher is present, the teacher can take out those individuals who require remediation for extra work.
- There is evidence of flexibility – 1 child, instead of cutting out words to stick in the correct blocks, wrote in the correct answers. Teacher does not mind this.
- Teacher works on a, 1 on 1, with several children.

- During this time kindergartners play in fantasy area.
- Teacher now checks completed work that the children bring to her.
- Then she goes back to check on a group of two kindergartners, who have been given something to do at the computer.
- There was some conflict in the fantasy area amongst three kindergartners – teacher goes to check and asks: “what are you doing?”
- She explains: “if you are playing a game you need to have some rules – otherwise everyone plays by different rules.”
- Apparently one of them does not want to play the “girl” – all three kindergartners are boys.
- One third grader is looking at map for San Diego. The teachers intervenes and says he can do that in his spare time – he needs to finish his work first.
- The kindergartners start fighting again.
- Older girl who is close by goes to inform teacher.
- The teacher calls them to a conference in her office this time.

10h20 to 15h00

- 3 older children are busy with computers now – probably for the past ten to fifteen minutes. They are checking the spelling that they had to do on the computer, so they are extending their exercise. Those who had finished are allowed to go and work on the computers.
- The two kindergartners who were involved in the conference to resolve their conflict are made to sit separately to calm down and to think about keeping their hands to themselves.

- A third grader who is not doing his work but is wandering and is sent to sit at the table and think about what he is doing.

10h25:

- Time to clean up.
- There is a huge clock in classroom – seems it is necessary for keeping to the schedule.
- By this time all the intermediate and primary children's work has been checked.
- These who had finished with their work are allowed to go and play computer games.
- Teacher checks on whether kindergartners have tidied up.

10h30:

- After tidying up all sit on floor – teacher in rocking chair.
- Stickers for those who did good work.

After Recess

Activity : Math

- Maths – all grades get exercises to do.
- Grade 1's do their exercise aloud in front of kindergartners.
- The teacher does one on one, with a grade 7's.
- For example, grade 1 – doing simple addition and sequencing for example:
 - $2 + 1 = ; 4 + 1 =$
 - Write next number of ...7, 8, 9, 10.....
- Grade 3's do addition:
 - $15 +$

- 33
- 38 +
- 43

- Grade 2- addition:

$$\begin{array}{r} 29 \\ \underline{53} \end{array}$$

- Grade 4 – multiplication:

$$\begin{array}{r} 400 \\ \underline{\times 4} \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 304 \\ \underline{\times 8} \end{array}$$

- Grade 5 – division:

$$42 \overline{)736}$$

[all sums are 3-digit number ÷ 42]

- Grade 6 - division by 37.
- Grade 7- Factors plus composite numbers.
- Kindergartners are counting lego and then with building these. They write 8's and draw the objects they were counting, using circles.

Parent Involvement

- A parent of grade 4 came in and is working with her and a friend who is also in grade 4.
- Another parent came in earlier to work on the computers for her own studies.

Interaction – Peer tutoring

A 4th grader stops a 3rd grader, Jim for helping a grade 1 boy.

- “Don’t do his work for him.” Apparently the rules are that you may help some one but do not do their work for them.
- A grade 7 puts up hand when he needs attention – the teacher goes over and guides him for a minute and then moves on.
- She works 1 on 1 with grade 4’s.
- A grade 6 girl is observed tutoring kindergartners at the computer.

11h45:

- Kindergarteners sing number songs – “Who stole a cookie from a cookie jar?”
- Grade 7 boys seem to enjoy and participate in this as well.

Photo 23

- If children are noisy during music time, the teacher sends them to their desks where they must put their heads down for one minute.
- She calls back the primary group and then the intermediate group.

After Lunch - 13h05: Activity - Story Time

- Reading *Arabian Nights* while all the children sit on floor.
- Some lie down after a while and are quite comfortable doing this.
- One 3rd grader refuses to be part of the group.
- The teacher asks him to join group or take time out, which he does.

- A grade two child who has been disruptive is given an option – “Either you sit still on the floor or go put your head down on a desk.” Which he does.
- “What do you want to do?”
- Chooses to go to a desk, which he does.
- “Three before me” – children must ask other for help before they come to her Taft uses this approach.

13h20: Activity - Gym

- Teacher reminds them about the rules: “Before we go to gym, lets remind ourselves about rules.”
 - Shoes on and tied.
 - Walk behind the leader.
- There is a leader for front of line. The children walk in pairs through a quiet one street town to the gym which is in a recreational centre for the community.
- The school gets allocated one hour per week for gym.
- Lawson also becomes the gym teacher during these days.
- Before they enter the gym, she reminds them: “We are going into a building where a lot of people are working and you need to be quiet until we are inside the gym.”
- The children all play the different games together.
- The older children do not appear to mind playing with the younger children.
- They choose people for their team so that there is a balance of older and younger children on each side.
- When they return to school, it is time to round up their things and go home.

END OF OBSERVATION

ANNEXURE E

Questionnaires

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Your kind assistance is requested in supplying me with the following information needed for the preparation of my visit to your institution. Please return this form, by fax, if possible, to :

S. Muthayan
12 Sheerness Rd.
East London, 5214
SOUTH AFRICA Tel. 431-353118 Fax. 431-353177/435642

NAME OF SCHOOL :

ADDRESS:

.....

.....

TELEPHONE NO. : **FAX NO. :**

Name of principal :

No. of multigrade classes in the school:

State which grades and ages are combined in these classes :

.....

.....

.....

In terms of the research requirements mentioned in the accompanying letter; I would like the opportunity to conduct my study in one of the multigrade classes where, three or more grades are combined. It would be preferable if these grades are within the range from Kindergarten to grade 3 (i.e. children aged 5 to 9 years).

Name of teacher of class :

(i.e. class I shall be observing)

Teaching qualifications (if possible) :

No. of years of teaching experience:

No. of years of teaching at this school :

No. of years of teaching in a multigrade classroom :

No. of children in the class :

State the number of children per age :

.....

Which grades are combined in this classroom :

QUESTIONNAIRE - PARENT

NAME OF SCHOOL :

Your kind assistance is requested in supplying me with the following information for my record and to contact you later, should the need arise. Please return this to :

S. Muthayan
12 Sheerness Rd.
East London, 5214
SOUTH AFRICA Tel. 431-353118 Fax. 431-353177/435642

NAME OF PARENT:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE NO. : **FAX NO. :**

OCCUPATION OF MOTHER :

OCCUPATION OF FATHER :

NO. OF MEMBERS IN THE FAMILY:

NO. OF CHILDREN :

AGES OF CHILDREN :

NO. OF CHILDREN AT MULTIGRADE SCHOOL:

AGES AND GRADES : (a)yrs / gr.; (b)yrs / gr.; (c)yrs / gr.;

(d)yrs / gr.; (e)yrs / gr.; (f)yrs / gr.;

NO. OF YEARS AT A MULTIGRADE SCHOOL : (a) ; (b) ; (c) ;

(d) ; (e) ; (f)

NO. OF CHILDREN ATTENDING OTHER SCHOOLS :

(Specify name(s) of school (s) and
whether schools are single or multigrade)

AGES AND GRADES : (a)yrs / gr.; (b)yrs / gr.; (c)yrs / gr.;

(d)yrs / gr.; (e)yrs / gr.; (f)yrs / gr.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Your kind assistance is requested in supplying me with the following information for my records and to contact you later, should the need arise. Please return this to :

S. Muthayan
12 Sheerness Rd.
East London, 5214
SOUTH AFRICA Tel. 431-353118 Fax. 431-353177/435642

NAME :	.....
OCCUPATION:	.....
ADDRESS:	..... .....
TELEPHONE NO. :	.....
FAX NO. :	.....

NAME OF INSTITUTION:	.....
TYPE OF INSTITUTION :	.....
DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES OF THE INSTITUTION:	..... .....
ADDRESS OF INSTITUTION :	..... ..... .....
TELEPHONE NO. :	.....
FAX NO. :	.....

NO. OF YEARS OF EXPERIENCE WITH MULTIGRADE CLASSROOMS :	.....
BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE NATURE OF THIS EXPERIENCE :	..... ..... ..... ..... .....

ANNEXURE F

Letter – Seeking permission to visit schools

431-353118 (H)

12 Sheerness Road
Bonnie Doon
East London, 5214
South Africa.

S. Muthayan

431-435642(fax)

431-353177(fax)

6 January 1998

The Administrative Officer
Ministry of Education Skills and Training
620 Superior Street, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: REQUEST FOR GUIDANCE AND PERMISSION TO VISIT SCHOOLS
IN B.C. FOR RESEARCH STUDY PURPOSES.**

I am a Deputy Director in the Department of Education, Province of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. My job responsibilities have included national research and policy development for children aged birth to nine years. I have also been a member of the National Minister of Education's Technical Committee which was responsible for writing the new South African curriculum for grades 1-9.

I am currently conducting research, to determine the suitability of multiage/multigrade teaching for schools in South Africa, for a thesis at Rhodes University under the supervision of Professor McKellar.

Purpose of the research study

The purpose of my research is to examine critically the features of multiage/multigrade teaching systems in both an eastern (India) and western (Canada) context and to consider their applicability for primary education (ages 5-9 years) in the Eastern Cape province, South Africa. The specific objectives of the study are to :

- * examine the curriculum being used
- * examine the teaching approach and methods
- * evaluate community and parental involvement, if any, in the programme
- * consider relevant aspects for use within the Eastern Cape context.

The Committee which drafted the new South African curriculum received technical assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Education during which time I became familiar with the innovative approaches in Canadian education. During an earlier visit to Ontario, I was informed by Debbie Belchez of the Ontario Ministry, about the strides your Ministry has taken in implementing a multiage approach. I obtained copies of the Primary Programme which, together with other literature, has influenced me to decide to conduct my research at multiage schools in B.C.

Study procedures for which permission is requested

I seek your guidance in identifying and granting me permission to visit two schools in British Columbia as an example of multiage/multigrade schools in Canada, in order for me to observe multigrade classroom teaching. I would like to emphasise that I shall **not** be attempting to evaluate or judge the schools or the teachers. My intention is to learn about how your education system has implemented this form of teaching so that I may learn about the suitability of multiage/multigrade teaching for South Africa. I believe the B.C. context would prove most useful to us because of the innovative, child centred and activity based approaches to primary education in B.C.

I would like to visit, in particular and, if possible, one classroom at a school where there is a combination of three or more grades, preferably between grades Kindergarten or 1 to 3 (i.e. the first three years of formal schooling). The period of my visit will be approximately two to three days. I would like to observe in the classroom during the morning. If the school is not in session in the afternoon, I would like to take the opportunity to interview the teacher for about an hour. If the teacher teaches in the morning and afternoon, I would like to arrange to have an hour of her time for the interview. On the second day, I would like to continue with observations, possibly take some photographs and do a bit of video recording if this is permissible. In the afternoon of that day, I would like to interview the principal and a community member or parent who is linked to the class that I shall be observing. The purpose of this latter session will be to elicit their opinion on the multiage/multigrade teaching as opposed to single grade teaching for their child.

I would prefer to visit one school in an urban setting and another in a rural setting. Since I have relatives in Abbotsford, it may be convenient for me if one or both these schools are either in or close to Abbotsford.

Due to my work and research commitments, I am able only to travel to visit the schools during the week commencing 9 March 1998 and I have made travel plans accordingly.

In summary, I request the following :

- 1.) Your guidance in identifying the two schools where I may conduct my studies and any information about how to make the arrangements for the visits and the proper protocol to follow.
- 2.) Permission from the school to observe the classrooms in session and to tape record the interviews with the teacher, principal and parent/community member so that I may refer to them in my analysis later. I shall ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants in the interview if they so wish. The University has an Ethical Standards Committee which monitors the research to ensure that correct methods are used and that ethical procedures are followed.

Please let me know if I may furnish you or the schools with any further information.

Yours sincerely,

S. Muthayan

ANNEXURE G

Consent Form

UNDERTAKING AND CONSENT


I, **Saloshini Muthayan**, do hereby undertake to abide by the research ethics of Rhodes University when conducting my research. I hereby undertake to protect the confidentiality of the **interviewee**,and shall use the information obtained for research purposes only.

Signed.....onat

I, the undersigned of.....
..... do hereby acknowledge that **Saloshini Muthayan** is presently undertaking research at Rhodes University in South Africa and that she has acquired certain information from me. I hereby unreservedly consent to Saloshini Muthayan using such information for research purposes and to publish such information in whatever form she deems appropriate..

Signed.....onat

ANNEXURE H
Sample of Planning

FRIDAY, <u>March 13.</u>	SKILLS/ CONCEPTS	MATERIALS:
Boss of the Day <u>Sandy</u> 8:30 ATTENDANCE/ ANNOUNCEMENTS CIRCLE TIME: <u>Drawing Books</u> Hello Songs/ O Canada/ Calendar/ Weather Merlin's Journal Morning Message		
9:00 PLAYTIME Individual Reading, Writing or Math Conferences		
9:20 THEME STUDY STORY: <u>Art Project</u> - torn tissue <u>Mt. Fuji landscape</u>		
RESPONSE/ ACTIVITY 		
10:30 RECESS BREAK		
10:45 COMPUTER		
LIBRARY/ NUMERACY <u>Probability</u> (Problem) <u>Number of the Day</u> <u>Making change</u> Grade One: - Measuring with <u>money patterns</u> Grade Two: - Small groups - <u>making change</u>		
12:05 LUNCH BREAK		
1:05 ATTENDANCE LITERACY: <u>LEARNING JOURNALS</u> <u>Clean-up</u> 1. Brainstorm <u>Videos:</u> 1. <u>Mufaro's</u> <u>Beautiful</u> <u>Daughters</u> 2/ Write/ draw 3 Share with student and adult		

Aesthetic and Artistic Development

- theme related arts and crafts
- sketching (Rosie)
- painting, coloring
- torn paper pictures
- origami
- construction (blocks, lego)
- theme related songs
- learning sign language
- drama and role play
- Young People's Concerts

Emotional and Social Development

- theme related stories and videos
- comparing cultures
- Circle Time
- Class Rules
- Class Family Meetings
- Brag Nights
- Olympic Stories (potential loss of gold medal in Snowboarding)
- Young People's Concerts

Physical Development

- ball skills
- cooperative games
- personal fitness
- Olympic Sports
- fieldtrips to curling, free skate, figure skating event
- eating healthy foods
- cooking program

Christmas - Plants - Japan The Olympic Games - Figure Skating

Intellectual Development

Science:

Plant Life
Science Experiments
Weather
Seasons

Social Studies:

Olympic Games
Culture of Japan
Mapping, Pictograms

Language Arts:

theme related stories
videos
Reading Road
theme related scrapbooks
Think Pinks, Phonics
printing books

Mathematics:

calendar (Numbers, Days of the Week, Months)
Days of School (Place Value)
Measurement (Rosie)
Addition (horizontal/Vertical)
Subtraction (horizontal/Vertical)
Introduction to Place Value

Personal Planning

Olympic Games:

planning for success
heros
Olympic Ideals
personal strengths

Work Habits:

using time wisely
work independently
follow directions
working cooperatively

Social Responsibility

Classroom Jobs:

attendance cards
Boss of the Day
water plants
classroom cleanup

Environment:

recycling
school yard clean-up
world news

Technology and Communication

computers - home position index fingers
- use of mouse
- knowledge of icons and what they do
- Programs 'Storybook Weaver'
'Brandon's Lunchbox'
letters and faxes - to Nagano and Saudi Arabia

ANNEXURE I

Sample of Benchmarks for Assessment

<p>Support Levels.</p> <p><u>Continuous Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> needs continuous support throughout the task. <p><u>Guided Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> may need assistance to get started may need some support throughout <p><u>Moderate Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> seeks reassurance to check their progress may need reassurance more than once during task <p><u>Minimal Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is generally able to work independently <p><u>No Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no support provided completely independent work on task 	<p>NUMBER</p> <p>Number Concepts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> understands and can use numbers and patterns for counting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rote counts forward to 100 - rote counts backward from 20 - skip counts orally by 2's, 5's, 10's to 100 - uses ordinal numbers to 10 builds, orders, and compares sets to 50 represents numbers to 50 in a variety of ways, may need support makes reasonable estimates of quantities to 50, counts to check and compare understands how to build, count, and record numbers to 99 with manipulatives, using the concept of tens and ones reads number words to 10 <p>Number Operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> can perform addition and subtraction to 18 using manipulatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - by counting on - by counting back - written in horizontal form - written in vertical form <p>PATTERNS AND RELATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrates understanding of basic number and non-number patterns by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - recognizing - reproducing - extending - creating <p>SHAPE AND SPACE</p> <p>Measurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> classifies, sequences, and compares objects according to size, length, and weight using non-standard units of measure knows the days of the week, months and seasons of the year understands yesterday, today and tomorrow knows how to tell time to the hour (analog) builds equivalent sets of coins up to ten cents in value identifies and knows the value of pennies, nickels and dimes, <p>Two-Dimensional Shapes and Three-Dimensional Objects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies and describes two-dimensional shapes (circles, triangles, squares, rectangles) recognizes by comparing, two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects in the environment (e.g. tin-can shaped, box-shaped) sorts classifies, and compares two-dimensional shapes sorts and classifies three-dimensional objects according to size and shape <p>Transformations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> knows and uses directional concepts in relation to self (e.g. over, under, beside, near, far, left, right) <p>STATISTICS AND PROBABILITY</p> <p>Data Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sorts and classifies objects according to significant attributes collects, organizes and analyzes data into concrete graphs or simple pictographs, with support <p>Chance and Uncertainty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses the relative terms <i>never</i>, <i>sometimes</i>, and <i>always</i> when predicting events
--	--

<p><u>Types, use book</u></p> <p>few words large print lots of pictures repetition - rhyme, words, patterns, visuals, simple style and language.</p> <p><u>Simple and Direct</u></p> <p>simple sentences blocks of text lots of pictures brief passages.</p> <p><u>Literal</u></p> <p>many words on a page standard size print some ideas may be complex.</p> <p><u>Literal</u></p> <p>complex ideas and language direct language, form, style.</p> <p><u>Literary</u></p> <p>sophisticated, specialized language complex style and form abstract/symbolic content</p>	<p><u>Support Levels, Continuous Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consistent support before, during, and after the reading often shared reading. <p><u>Guided Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> guidance before, during, and after the reading some intervention and instruction. <p><u>Moderate Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some support at points in the reading process may be deliberate modeling with independent practice. <p><u>Minimal Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> minimal support often at only one stage (e.g. before or after reading). <p><u>No Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no support provided completely independent reading
--	--

<p><u>Types, use book</u></p> <p>few words large print lots of pictures repetition - rhyme, words, patterns, visuals, simple style and language.</p> <p><u>Simple and Direct</u></p> <p>simple sentences blocks of text lots of pictures brief passages.</p> <p><u>Literal</u></p> <p>many words on a page standard size print some ideas may be complex, <u>created</u></p> <p>complex ideas and language direct language, form, style.</p> <p><u>Literary</u></p> <p>sophisticated, specialized language complex style and form abstract/symbolic content</p>	<p><u>Support Levels, Continuous Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consistent support before, during, and after the reading often shared reading. <p><u>Guided Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> guidance before, during, and after the reading some intervention and instruction. <p><u>Moderate Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some support at points in the reading process may be deliberate modeling with independent practice. <p><u>Minimal Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> minimal support often at only one stage (e.g. before or after reading). <p><u>No Support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no support provided completely independent reading
---	--

<p>EARLY IN THE YEAR</p> <p><u>Fluency</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> relies on another person to read the text joins in familiar stories (shared reading) 'role plays' reading, making up a story about the pictures 'memory reads' books with simple repetitive language patterns reads some environmental print such as signs or labels in context explores books for short periods of time <p><u>Decoding/Word Attack</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identified sound patterns in words (rhyme, alliteration) uses pictures to predict text knows that sounds and letters make words recognizes and uses simple patterns (repeated words and phrases) can identify letters that match sounds begins to focus on print but uses pictures to predict and confirm meaning. <p><u>Comprehension</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> thinks that the pictures tell the story identifies the main information provided in illustrations understands that the text, as well as the illustrations, tell the story. <p><u>Print Conventions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> knows books contain stories turns pages from the front of the book to the back distinguishes between upper and lower case letters begins to develop knowledge of directionality of print. <p><u>Purpose</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> gets information from classroom posters, labels, charts knows that print is a source of information. <p><u>Attitudes/ Values</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> listens attentively when being read to knows that print is a source of enjoyment enjoys rereading familiar books they have listened to 	
---	--

<p>MID-YEAR</p> <p><u>Fluency</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reads orally slowly and deliberately (word for word) reads orally from their own writing and familiar materials usually chooses short books with simple narratives and with illustrations <p><u>Decoding/ Word Attack</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops knowledge of common sound/symbol relationships begins to use common letter/sound relationships to figure out words (e.g. begins to use consonant and short vowel sounds to 'sound out' simple words) begins to develop a basic set of sight words begins to monitor and self correct with support (prompts and cues given) <p><u>Comprehension</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> begins to develop a sense of story understands the topic (what the book is about) uses pictures to make predictions and guide retelling remembers and retells familiar stories retells with approximate sequence recounts a personal story loosely connected to the text. <p><u>Print Conventions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognizes that print is made up of separate words in a piece of text, locates words, lines, spaces, letters. <p><u>Purpose</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> begins to explore varying kinds of texts independently to locate information reads orally to share familiar material. <p><u>Attitudes/ Values</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> chooses to explore books independently at times. 	
---	--

<u>Text Types</u>	<u>Support Levels</u>
<u>Picture Book</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • few words • large print • lots of pictures • repetition - rhyme, words, patterns, visuals. • simple style and language. 	<u>Continuous Support</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consistent support before, during, and after the reading • often shared reading.
<u>Simple and Direct</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple sentences • blocks of text • lots of pictures • brief passages. 	<u>Guided Support</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guidance before, during, and after the reading • some intervention and interaction.
<u>Deliberate</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • many words on a page • standard size print • some ideas may be complex. 	<u>Moderate Support</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some support at points in the reading process • may be deliberate modeling with independent practice.
<u>Elaborated</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complex ideas and language • direct language, form, style. 	<u>Minimal Support</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minimal support • often at only one stage (e.g. before or after reading).
<u>Sophisticated</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sophisticated, specialized language • complex style and form • abstract/symbolic content 	<u>No Support</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no support provided • completely independent reading

END OF YEAR
Fluency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focuses on reading fluently (reading sentences or phrases rather than word by word) • focuses on the whole story rather than individual words • can sustain reading for short periods (up to (15 to 20 minutes)
Decoding/ Word Attack <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognizes basic 'high-frequency' words and phrases by sight • identifies known, familiar words in other context • applies phonics generalizations about single letters and combinations of letters • can 'sound out' two syllable words by breaking them into parts (may need support) • uses several ways of identifying unknown words (phonics, word structure, context)
Comprehension <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remembers and talks about story characters and events • describes the sequence of main events in a story • checks predictions against other cues such a pictures and the print itself • identifies connections between ideas and information and own experiences
Print Conventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on request indicates the beginning and ends of sentences • begins to attend to punctuation
Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explores varying kinds of texts independently
Attitudes/ Values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expresses likes/dislikes for particular topics or books • is willing to take risks when reading • enjoys rereading favourite books • writes or draws about stories and information they read or listened to • use story characters, events and language in play

ANNEXURE J

Sample of Progress Reports

Province of British Columbia - Ministry of Education
School District #
Elementary Progress Report

North Park Elementary
Box 222, ABC, 123
Phone 555-55555

STEWART
Grade 2, Class 2
Age (March 13, 1998): 7 years 8 months
Reporting Period: November 7, 1997 to March 13, 1998

STUDENT'S COMMENTS: (attached)

PARENT'S COMMENTS: (attached)

TEACHER'S COMMENTS:

Strengths:

Stewart is a hard working student who puts a lot of effort into everything he does. He is a good listener, works responsibly during independent work times (library sheets, mathbook) and produces neat, well organized work. He has very good spelling skills in both his tests and in his functional writing. In math, he easily understands the concepts presented. He is reading a bit above grade level with good fluency and excellent comprehension.

Areas to Focus On:

- counting and skip counting forwards and back using 3 digit numbers
- adding details to stories to increase length and complexity
- develop understanding of story sequence (character, setting, plot)

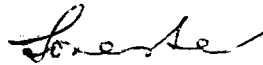
Growth Plan:

- novel study with the whole class next term
- develop use of dictionary skills
- develop understanding of the concept of what a sentence is and learn correct use of capitals and periods

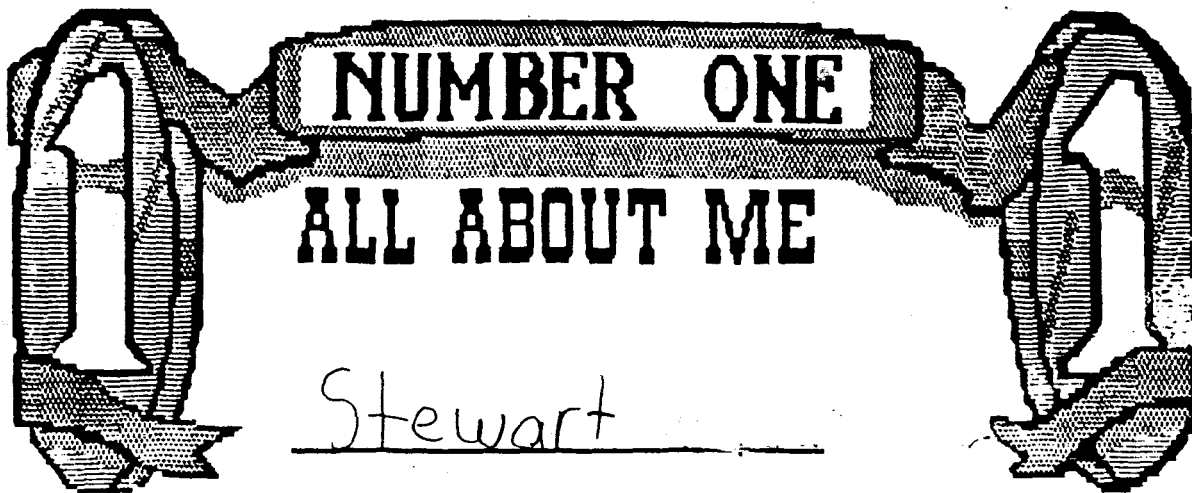
Currently, Stewart is working at grade level in all areas. Stewart is a pleasure to have in our class. Keep up the good work Stewart!



Teacher's Signature

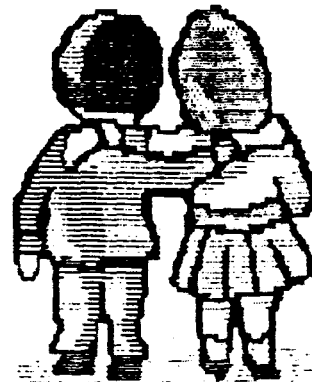


Principal's Signature



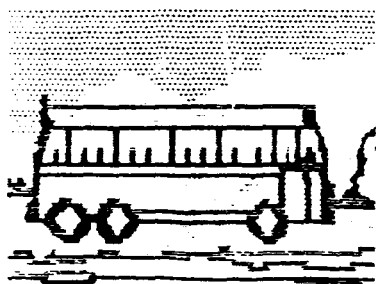
DATE: Feb. 25

Dear MOM and Dad



While you look at my work with me I want you to notice these things:

1. I am bring my best at
printing.
2. I am doing good at my math
take-aways.
3. I am doing better at
P.E. Basket
ball.

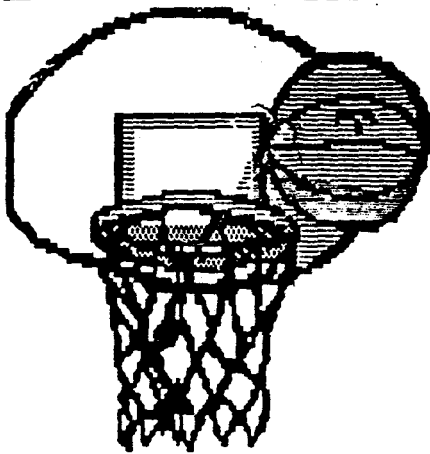


These are the things I think I do well:

1. I think I do well at
handling the ball. I think I
organize my binders good.

2. I am banging the ball good.

3. I listen to the hockey radio now.



Some things I have learned this term are:

1. To be a good sport and pass the ball.

2. To rite better than I
I've sto go out of the line.

3. I mark stuff better. My project.

Some things I still hope to learn are:

1. I want to do better at stick handling
2. I want to get better goals in hockey
3. I want to get better at Peking

Please make a comment to me!

Steward we are proud of your achievements and wish you good goals for both sports and academic achievements

Parent's Comments

Name: Stewart

Date: March 26 98

What I noticed about my child's growth in his/her learning:

He enjoys his work because
he feels less pressure to
achieve goals.

Focus for my child's continued growth:

To slow down instead of
rushing through his work.

Additional Comments:

Parent's signature: Janet Thomas

School District # - Kamloops/Thompson

Name:	Kathleen	Teacher:	V Oldman
School:	Pearce Park Elementary	Date:	November 98
Grade:	One	Term:	First <u>Second</u> Third

The goals of the Primary Program are to provide a variety of experience that foster the child's:

- Aesthetic and Artistic Development
- Emotional and Social Development
- Intellectual Development
- Physical Development
- Social Responsibility
- Personal Planning

All goals are emphasized throughout the entire Primary Program.

Your child's progress relative to curriculum objectives :
at grade level see program changes

Aesthetic and Artistic Development	Emotional and Social Development	Physical Development
Kathleen: - enjoys art - drawings are immature, needs to add more detail - listens carefully to instructions and is organized - loves Sign Language, learning new signs quickly	- is very quiet, yet confident - is well liked by peers - is quietly supportive of her classmates - is able to take responsibility for actions	- loves movement - good gross motor skills - enjoyed learning about Olympic sports - loves figure skating often explaining what she knows

Social Responsibility	Personal Planning
Kathleen: - takes classroom jobs very seriously - is learning how to solve problems independently - is very kind and caring - is aware of world issues, displays appropriate interest or concern	- uses her time wisely - is very focussed during lessons when doing her schoolwork - is an organized person, who plans what she is going to do in advance

Intellectual Development

- Kathleen:** - is a very serious and dedicated student
- enjoyed our Olympic Theme, bringing Olympic items to share with her classmates
 - expressed an understanding of the degree of difficulty the tricks were in figure skating
 - was very interested in learning about plants, often observing and measuring Rosie, the class Amaryllis during playtime
 - did her homework, finding out why plants have flowers
 - enjoys computer time and has a good understanding of the programs we are using

Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking:	Exceeding Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Below Expectations
is developing a sight vocabulary (familiar words)		*	
knowledge of letter sounds		*	
uses strategies to determine unknown words		*	
reads with fluency and expression		*	
is spelling some words properly		*	
listens actively		*	

- Kathleen:**
- is progressing well in reading and writing
 - is a fluent reader, who comprehends all she reads
 - is able to convey her thoughts and understandings of the world when she writes
 - is writing in phrases, complete sentences and paragraphs
 - is beginning to experiment with punctuation

Math Concepts	Exceeding Expectations	Meeting Expectations Competent Developing	Below Expectations
can count by 1's, 5's and 10's to 100		*	
can identify numbers to 50		*	
can measure objects using standard/non-standard units		*	
understands and is able to discuss simple graphs		*	

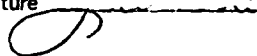
Kathleen:

- loves math, telling her teacher that she practices every day at home with her Fraidy Cat Game
- numerals are printed neatly
- is able to add and subtract to 10 with ease
- when adding, she is able to add on from an initial number
- easily understands new concepts
- can measure using centimetres
- has a good understanding of place value

Ways to Support Kathleen's Learning:

- continue to provide Kathleen with interesting learning opportunities
- encourage Kathleen to take her time when drawing and to add more interesting details
- give her opportunities to 'lighten up' and have lots of fun

Teacher's Signature



Principal's Signature

More good work, Kathleen. Keep it up. I always enjoy your friendliness and wonderful manners!

Name: Sandy

Second Term Notes

Theme Development (Socials, Physical Develop)

- has brought much from the Net.
- has lots of info on curling.
- really signing lots "Power of the Dream"

Skating, Hockey, Curling
mom to coach us

Language Arts

knowledge of letters - excellent

Oral Reading - Wizard of Oz - confident/fluent
Pink Tutus - confident reading from sight / no sounding out / good voice

Writing = able to write in phrases/sentences.] printing paragraphs
writing stories during playtime.] making sense.

Reading Road - writing to dad.

Math - Count ✓
- Reccg. → 15, 19 backwards
Measurement:
Addition
Subtraction
Numerals (Printing) -
Place Value

P.E.

Attitude - good sport.

Skills - excellent gross motor

Knowledge - much knowledge

* very excited about curling
showed leadership

Art

- excellent fine motor
- excellent follow directions

Behavior (Social/Emotional) Science (Plants).

- very quiet
- is supportive and helpful to others in a quiet way "I can help you if you like."

* relieved/happier after seeing
dad

ANNEXURE K
Sample of Policy

8 SCHOOL STAFF COMMITTEES

Each school staff shall be entitled to develop a s for the purpose of fostering communication an teachers and administrative officers.

The purpose of this committee is to discuss r concern and to make recommendations that woulc within the resources available. Concerns that can school level will be forwarded to the appropriate A ent for further consideration.

All decisions and recommendations of the staff consistent with the terms and conditions of this a

9 CLASS SIZE AND CLASS COMPOSITION

9.1 Commencing September 1991, maximum class sizes shall be:

Elementary:

First Year Primary (1/2 day)	20 Students
Ungraded Primary	23 Students
Ungraded Primary (including Year One Students)	25 Students
Single Grade Primary	24 Students
Primary Intermediate Split	25 "
Multigrade Intermediate	27 "
Intermediate Single Grade	29 "

Secondary:

English, Science Lab Classes	28 Students
Home Economics	26 "
Secondary I.E.	24 "
Other Secondary Classes	29 Students

Special Education:

Special Needs - High Incidence	15 Students
Special Needs - Low Incidence	10 "

9.2 The integration of students with low incidence special needs will result in a smaller class size by at least one (1) less than the numbers listed above. The class size maximums will be reduced 1:1:1 for up to a maximum of three integrated students. However, if a teacher assistant (not a personal attendant) were assigned to the class/teacher, then the reduction of maximums would be 1:1 for the first student and a further reduction of one (1) for the third student.

9.3 Classes may exceed the maximums in the following circumstances:



First Nations Support Workers

The purpose of the First Nations Support Worker program is to provide direct student-centered services to First Nations students in the areas of educational assistance, cultural identity, and informal support and encouragement. The First Nations Support Worker Program provides role models, advocates self-confidence of First Nations students so that their opportunity for a positive and successful school experience is increased.

The role of the Support Worker provides the following services to students:

- Tutors and advises First Nations students;
- Assists in tending to some of student's personal needs;
- Assists in cultural awareness in school and classroom;
- Assists in school field trips;
- Provides a communication link between school and home.

