

## Multi-Age Classes

- Multi-age classes, often referred to as “combination classes” or “split classes”, are supported by the Vancouver School District.
- Multi-age classes enable children of different ages and abilities to be taught together in the same classroom. Often, this takes the form of two grade levels, combined in one classroom, such as a grade 1/2 grouping. The curriculum taught in these classrooms is the same as that taught to students in single grade classrooms.
- A multi-age or combination class is different from a “multi-age cluster” or “family grouping”, whereby children of different ages are grouped together in classes that span two or three age levels, and where students remain with the same teacher for two or three years, such as a K/1/2 grouping.
- Multi-age classes are an established part of our school system, and a positive place for your child to learn.

## Multi-Age Classes and Students

- A multi-age program enables children to make continuous progress based on their learning rate and pace. Detailed studies have shown that on average a five year span of developmental difference is typically found in a single grade group. Students in two grades together combine to span about six years of difference in the various aspects of their development.
- While teachers of multi-age classes follow the grade specific curriculum requirements stipulated by the Ministry of Education, multi-age classes allow for greater flexibility for students who are faster or slower to develop.
- The organization of multi-age classes recognizes that children learn at different rates and have individual learning needs. Instructional methods, such as cooperative learning, are deployed in multi-age classes in an effort to encourage responsible and independent learning, and to better meet individual needs.

## Multi-Age Classes and Schools

- Multi-age classes are often an administrative necessity because they allow for the greatest number of students to be educated in the fewest number of classrooms.
- This organization allows the Vancouver School District to meet its specified class size averages for the primary and intermediate levels, while ensuring that classes are roughly equal in size and balanced in respect to student needs.
- Principals have the challenge of devising class organizations at their given school. In an effort to ensure all students are placed in appropriately balanced classrooms, principals use criteria such as age, range of ability, special learning needs, gender, social groupings, and teacher recommendation.
- Multi-age classes create more opportunity for the flexible placement of children in programs that best serve their academic or social needs.

## Multi-Age Research

A number of studies have been conducted regarding the effectiveness of multi-age classes. Below are some key findings that summarize the advantages and disadvantages of multi-age organizations:

### ADVANTAGES

- ⇒ Students in multi-age classes have been found to do as well or better in the academic areas of math, language, science and social studies; and in terms of independence, responsibility, and study habits.
- ⇒ The cooperative environment of the multi-age class encourages students to build confidence, self-concept, and a strong sense of belonging.
- ⇒ A flexible grouping of children with similar interests, abilities and skill levels, and enriched curriculum leads to the wider range of interests and experience of the students.
- ⇒ Where appropriate, a multi-age program enables children to take an extra year to learn without a formal change in their status.

## DISADVANTAGES

- ⇒ When the number of children in a mixed grade classroom is small, it may be difficult for same-age, same-sex children to develop friendships.
- ⇒ Teachers are responsible for greater planning and instruction for a wider range of students to meet the curriculum requirements of the Ministry of Education.
- ⇒ A wider range of learning materials is required for each separate classroom.

### Further Reading

Association for Multi-age Education  
<http://www.multiage.org>

Balck, Susan. "Beyond Age and Grade" Executive Educator, Vol. 15, Number 9 (September 1993) pp 17-20.

Woelfel, K. "The Dual-Age Classroom: questions and answers". Principal, Vol. 71, No. 3 pp 32-33.

Ladish, Richard. "The Pros and Cons of Mixed-Age Classrooms". High Expectations, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1993) pp 1-8.

## BEYOND AGE AND GRADE A MULTI-AGE CLASS RESOURCE



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