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Making Multi-Age Work

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Making Multi-Age Work

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Research Question

What are the best grouping strategies for delivering instruction and facilitating student work in a multi-age setting?

Definition

Multi-Age: Includes students of a greater age range than is typically found in a single grade and is heterogeneous in regards to achievement or ability level.



Figure 1: My 1st & 2nd grade multi-age class

Setting & Participants

- Very large urban school district
- 96% minority students
- 81% low-income students
- 1st and 2nd grade multi-age classroom

Data Collection

Field notes, journal entries, lesson plans, student work, video clips, photographs, & informal student interviews

Grouping Strategies

Grade Level Grouping

"I don't like being all by myself. I can't do anything and I can't talk about it."

- Used for math lessons and independent practice
- 1st and 2nd graders were taught separately, one group at a time
- Results:** Students were easily distracted, independent workers did not receive necessary support, lessons and practice became less hands-on and interactive & I was frazzled.

Moving Away from Grade Level Grouping

- Initially, literacy center groups were created within the grade divides
- Results:** Not all student needs were being met, and behavior and performance were poor.
- Later, we created new centers and adjusted the grouping practices so that students visited the centers they needed, rather than the ones assigned to their grade level
- Results:** Improved behavior and performance

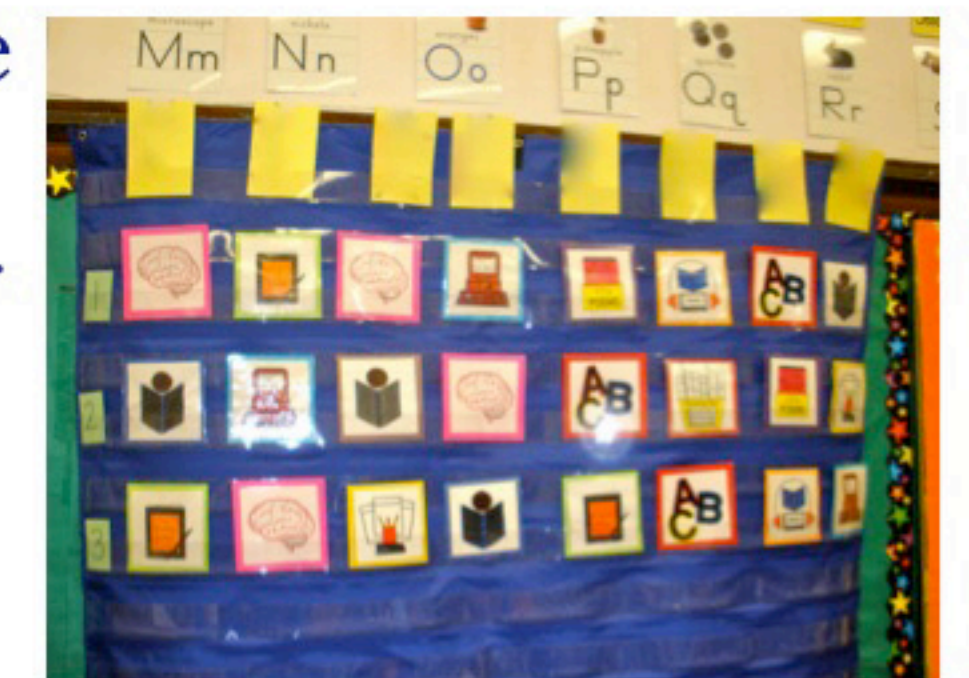


Figure 2: Revised Literacy Centers rotation chart

Whole Class Experiences

- Morning Meeting: Differentiated literacy and math practice: calendar, days of the school year tally, name collection box, hunks and chunks song
- Results:** 1st graders learned from 2nd graders, students were generally engaged as active participants



Figure 3: 1st grade student representation of the morning meeting

Blending Whole Class and Group Experiences

- Writers' Workshop- Three days of whole class instruction & two days of pulled group instruction
- Flexible groups pulled for support or challenge
- Science/Social Studies- Whole class lesson followed by group work
- Groups worked together regardless of process levels. Content knowledge level was generally the same for all students.



Figure 4: Social Studies projects completed in mixed-grade groups

Conclusions

For my students, the most successful grouping practices were flexible and changing and were based on student needs rather than grade level. Dividing the students into grade level groups only met the academic needs of those students who were "average" for their grade. By combining whole class and group experiences, I was able to meet students' varied needs while exposing them to the variety available in the multi-age setting.

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