

influenced your child and your expectations of his performance?

The desire on the part of some schools to return to the basics is heartening. The restoration of homework assignments, the generation of enthusiasm for quality and achievement are a healthy reaction against the wasteful trends of other years. Is this enough?

The most important need today, as I see it, is challenge. Every child in the Christian community must be challenged to reach the highest competence of which he or she is capable. Challenge to use one's talents to the best of his ability is the key to effective education.

The effective teacher and the effective school challenges the student. The effective teacher is enthusiastic, conscientious and is competent in his work. The effective teacher demands high standards and encourages discipline for God's sake.

According to Mark Van Doren the one intolerable thing in education is the absence of intellectual design.

According to the Scriptures the one intolerable thing in Christian education is aimless, Godless behavior.

When the goal for basic Christian education is the standard for performance and instruction, then that which is basic will be taught. The pious and religious education of the children of believers gives the teacher the proper incentive to teach. The student will have the incentive to learn and to study. The parent will have the incentive to support the instruction in the school.

"Wisdom is the principal thing;  
therefore get wisdom:  
and with all thy getting  
get understanding." Proverbs 4:7.

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## **The Multi-grade Classroom**

John Kalsbeek, Jr.

Picture in your minds five year old kindergartners and nine or ten year old fourth graders in the same room with the same

teacher along with first, second, and third graders and you have a multi-grade classroom school. In some schools only two or three grades may be put together in a single classroom while in other schools there may be six or even nine grades. The little country school house of thirty-forty years ago with nine grades in one room is a prime example of the type of school being considered in this article.

The multi-grade classroom is not, then, one of the new innovations of modern educators but rather a throwback to an old system which dates back many many years. It was a system that worked surprisingly well then and still works today. It is becoming more and more evident that the demand for change from the old township school house with its limited curriculum to today's big consolidated schools with their catalog of different subjects for a curriculum, has not brought with it the desired academic improvement. Just the opposite seems to be occurring. Academic standards have had an embarrassing tendency to plummet from year to year much to the consternation of school communities, boards, faculties, and parents. Even the government is becoming more and more concerned and is naturally trying to correct the situation by becoming even more involved than it is already.

However, it is not going to be the burden of this article to promote one system over against and above another system. Neither will its goal be to point out advantages and disadvantages of one over another. In the first place, this is being done to avoid the pitfall of stepping on other educators' toes. Each system has its merits and also its demerits. In both you have to take the bad with the good while making every effort to correct the bad. In the second place, I am in no position to make such comparisons. My nine years from first grade through ninth grade in Hope Prot. Ref'd. Chr. School were in a multi-grade classroom and all the years I've taught have been in multi-grade classroom schools. I have very little background in a single grade situation and have very little experiential knowledge as to how to teach in such a situation. Therefore, obviously, I'm in no position to make judgments in regard to advantages of one over the other.

Rather in this article I will attempt to do three things: First of all I will show what is needed to make the multi-grade classroom work. Secondly, I will write about the things I like in the multi-grade classroom. Finally, I will point out some of the

problems that arise in this type of school.

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### *MAKING THE MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOM WORK*

In order for the multi-grade classroom to work so that God's covenant seed are adequately instructed, I wish to consider four fundamental and basic ideas. These are: discipline, organization, grouping of grades, and the cycling of subjects.

Discipline, obviously, is essential. Without it one has chaos and disorder. Students are forced to learn early that there are certain things they just cannot do in a multi-grade classroom. For example, when the teacher is busy with another class, they may not come up to the teacher, interrupt the class, and ask a question. Such action is rude and discourteous to teachers and classmates alike. If they have a question, they have to discipline themselves to go on to the next problem and ask the question later when the teacher is free. Unnecessary noises such as the rumpling of papers, the sharpening of pencils, the dropping of books, or whispering have to be discouraged and eventually students must be penalized if they are not able to learn by the verbal message. In this case, a word to the wise is usually sufficient. A few others usually need the assurance that actions speak louder than words. Unnecessary movement around the room must also be limited.

Without order in the classroom it would be impossible to teach or to learn. This type of order requires strict enforcement by the teacher. Give in just a little and soon it's out of hand.

Students need to have a clear concept of what they may and may not do. They have to know what their teacher expects of them. They must learn to use good judgment and self control. In the final analysis most rules are made by the students not by the teacher. If they persist in disruptive behavior, they force the teacher to enact rules to control them.

The multi-grade classroom forces teachers and students alike to be organized and orderly.

This implies, first of all, that a schedule of subject periods must be clearly defined and laid out. The teacher, and also the students, have to know what's going to happen each and every period of the day. To deviate from the known schedule frequently brings with it confusion, disorder and often consternation.

Varying or changing the schedule of the day may be thought to be the spice of life but I've found it all too often causes a certain degree of unneeded uncertainty and unwanted disorder.

Secondly, it is imperative that the students know what is expected of them. Are assignments collected every day or is it a hit and miss affair? If students think there is a possibility, even a remote possibility, that their work might not be collected, expect a decline in that pupil's performance and an increasing amount of unfinished work turned in each day. The student needs the discipline of knowing he'll be required to hand in his work every day without fail. Anything less brings disorder and confusion to his life and is harmful to his covenant wellbeing.

Also a teacher should be conscientious enough to mark the papers collected each day immediately before the next school day begins. Sometimes, because of other activities, he may be forced to mark them later, but woe to that poor teacher who allows them to pile up for a couple of days before he marks them. The stack soon becomes mountainous and an over-powering burden. Students begin asking about last week's history test or how did they do on last Friday's arithmetic assignment. To be consistent it is important that, not only must the student finish his daily quota of work, but also the teacher.

The grouping of grades consists of putting two, three, or more grades together for one particular subject.

An example of grade grouping would be to combine all the grades in a given room for one and the same Bible lesson. Naturally, grade and age differences have to be taken into consideration. It would be inconceivable that anyone would require a kindergartner to know as much and learn as fast as a fourth grader. One way to compensate for this difference is to prepare different tests for the different levels. Another way is to adjust the grading scale of a test for each separate grade. Many subjects can be taught to two or more grades grouped together while others, such as mathematics and reading, probably should not be used in this way because the necessary progression from one concept to the next has to be taught in the proper sequence. However, even in these subjects if two classes are working on decimal fractions or dictionary skills at the same time, grouping them is feasible and beneficial.

In order that fifth graders do not receive the same geography or science material when they reach the sixth grade the school is

forced to resort to cycling materials or alternating them from one year to the next. One year Western Hemisphere Geography may be taught while the next year the geography course will be on the Eastern Hemisphere. This can easily be done in Bible, social studies, science, even literature.

Obviously, class grouping practically necessitates the cycling of various subject materials. If one is incorporated the other must also be used. By using this approach, a teacher can give a more meaningful presentation to each class not only but also spend more time with each group.

It doesn't take a new teacher long, nor a school board, to see that the only way out of too many presentations and too little time for each grade is to group grades and begin cycling materials over two or three year periods.

Discipline, organization, grouping of grades and cycling of subjects all help to make a multi-grade classroom work efficiently and effectively. They are as essential to the running of a school as a motor is to an automobile.

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#### *WHAT I LIKE ABOUT TEACHING IN A MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOM SCHOOL.*

First of all, I especially like and appreciate the close parent-teacher relationship that exists. Perhaps because the school is small, parents realizing their support is essential, are vitally concerned about the school. Parents are eager to work closely with the teacher and to help in any way they can at home. Parents I've worked with, have wholeheartedly backed the school and the teachers. This is a humbling experience for teachers because we often make mistakes, sometimes very serious ones. I am thankful to God for understanding parents who stand behind their teacher even in his mistakes. These are parents, who don't condone the mistakes or ignore them, but discuss them openly with the teacher and not openly in front of their children. You, the parents, make the schools you support what they are—institutions that give covenant instruction. Your enthusiasm is passed on to your children but so is an apathetic attitude. Your child soon learns that you will not tolerate any nonsense at school.

In the second place, I enjoy working with the same students

year after year. This is beneficial to the students but also to me. The student in his first year becomes acquainted with his teacher. He learns his teacher's likes and dislikes. These change very little from year to year. If the teacher dislikes gum chewing in the classroom one year, it's probable that he will also dislike it the next year and for years to come. The student can expect the same set of standards every year he has the same teacher. Students become used to a teacher's way of teaching, his vocabulary, his personality and habits. This removes the upsetting adjustment problems that sometimes occur because of a frequent change of teachers. It goes without saying that each teacher does have his own peculiarities and values.

The teacher also benefits by having the same basic group of students over a given number of years. He knows their personalities, habits, weaknesses, attitudes, likes and dislikes. He knows from one year to the next exactly what to expect from each student. He learns how to handle each one in his own individual way. With some, stern measures are needed and effective while with others a soft word or look is enough. Some, the teacher can joke with while others are easily offended. Some need constant encouragement because they have a low concept of themselves and of their ability, while others need a little toning down occasionally. The teacher does not have to find these things out about a whole new group of students each year in a multi-grade classroom.

In the third place, I am happy when I see older students and younger students participating in the same playground activity together. Because of the smallness of a small school, students are forced to engage in recess activities together. The grade distinction disappears in a large measure on the playground. Furthermore, not only young and old, but also girls and boys enjoy games together. Mixed teams are preferable while the girls against the boys concept should be discouraged. Being forced to depend on each other brings with it a mutual respect for each other. Problems arise infrequently but usually pass away with a new recess or a new day.

In the fourth place, I find teaching all the different subjects very stimulating. I, as a teacher, am learning along with the students. I will concede the probability that a teacher specializing in one subject area could and should do better work in that particular area. For this reason many schools are moving

in that direction. Yet I enjoy teaching mathematics, algebra, history, geography, science, German, literature and Bible. Teaching is a continuous growing process for me as a teacher in the many different subject areas.

In the fifth place, I believe students in a multi-grade classroom situation are forced to work alone without being fully dependent on the help of a teacher and this is good for them. They are forced to become independent in their work and study habits. They soon learn that they have to help themselves and not to expect the aid of a teacher for every little problem. A little of Thoreau's "self reliance" is by necessity forced upon each child. Most thrive on it and become good all around students. By being forced to work independently, study habits are being formed and activated. Paul's advice to Timothy was "to study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed..." II Timothy 2:15. Such study is indeed learned, promoted, and practiced in a multi-grade classroom.

Finally, multi-grade classroom students are forced to concentrate and not to be distracted by other classroom activities. They have to shut out other classroom noises in order to do their own assignments. This has to be learned. At first it causes a new student from a single grade classroom quite an adjustment problem. In our age, with all the noises of modern society, who can measure how important it is for a person to be able to shut out some of these noises in order to concentrate?

Teaching in a multi-grade classroom is enjoyable. Ask others who teach under similar circumstances and they will no doubt add to the above list other reasons why they like teaching in these schools.

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## SOME PROBLEMS OF THE MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOM SCHOOL

First, it is important that teachers learn to put first things first. Often a teacher becomes so involved in teaching the material laid out for a particular day that he unintentionally forgets student needs. A real danger that needs to be avoided at all costs is that a teacher teaches subjects instead of students. The subject material becomes the primary goal while the covenant child is relegated to a position of secondary importance. Such an order is just backward. Subject material is important, no

doubt about it, but the students' needs and development must always be first. Consequently, a meaningless objective or goal is to finish the textbook before the end of the year. What good will come of teaching the entire mathematics book if not one of the students in the grade has learned and can use the material presented? The result is wasted effort. In a multi-grade classroom it is easy to put subject materials before students. As soon as one class presentation is finished the teacher immediately begins working with another class. The teacher can busy himself so much that he has no time to help individual students.

Another problem that a small school often faces is that purchasing needed equipment sometimes has to wait because of limited resources. The science program often suffers because expensive laboratory equipment just doesn't seem so very essential. As a result suggested experiments that actually show how the concept being taught works and that promotes student interest, are passed up because the necessary equipment isn't available. Sometimes it's such basic materials as wall maps, audio visual aids like overhead projectors, film strip projectors, and filmstrips and cassette recorders. It may even be duplicating equipment. Eventually these are purchased but usually after a lengthy time on the "want list".

A third problem is that in a small multi-grade classroom school it is almost impossible to carry on any kind of remedial program for the poorly motivated student and slow learner. To hire a full-time or even part-time remedial teacher for two or three remedial students just would not be feasible in most small schools. The conscientious teacher takes special pains to help such a student even if it requires some after school sessions.

Along with these problems are the regular everyday problems that every school faces: discipline, attitudes of students, poor work habits, arguments and fighting on the playground, dress codes, disrespect of teachers and authority. These are some of the everyday problems of sin that must be combated in the school and on the playground by the concerned and often frustrated teachers and administrators.

The wonder of it all is that such a system works as well as it does. I'm convinced that these schools are doing the work they are called upon to do and that the students on the whole do not suffer because of the system. Generally, children taught in the small multi-grade classroom are adequately equipped academic-



ally and spiritually to face the challenges of high school instruction. In truth, many of them excel on the high school level.

I believe that in most cases a child who has difficulty in a multi-grade classroom would have similar problems in a single grade classroom.

These schools work not because the teachers are the world's best thinkers and instructors; not because you parents are the most dedicated parents in existence; nor because our students are the cream of the crop; but because they have God's continued blessing and support from day to day and from year to year. They are His gift to you as parents, students and teachers. He will give grace to covenant parents and teachers to maintain these schools to His glory and as a means to fulfil the covenant obligations and responsibilities of instructing His covenant seed.

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## **CAREER EDUCATION: A LEGITIMATE EMPHASIS?**

Don Doezema

There is a self-evident need, in my judgment, radically to reform an education which has become non-utilitarian and, in the words of the young people, "irrelevant" to such a large part of our clientele. Fully a third of our high school students leave school before graduation, with no skills, no marketable resources, and no intention or competence to enter college.

There can be no doubt that it is that sort of assessment of the American educational scene which gave impetus to what has become a movement of no little importance in the schools of our country: Career Education. The indictment was made by Sydney P. Marland, the then HEW Assistant Secretary for Education, in a speech made at a 1972 meeting of the Board of Directors and the staff of the Council for Basic Education. The remedy, as he saw it, was an all-pervasive Career Education, ranging from the early elementary grades all the way through secondary and post-secondary education. Marland could speak as a representa-