

The Impact of Multiage Classroom Environments on Student Social Behaviors at a
Selected Elementary School

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of multiage classroom environments on student's social behaviors. The sample consisted of 22 students who were randomly selected from a multiage classroom. Of the 22 students, 11 of the students were male and 11 were female. The data collection instruments used for this study consisted of two surveys created by the researcher. The first survey focused on how the students perceived the classroom environment. The second survey focused on students social skills. Observations and interviews were also used in order to substantiate both of the surveys given to the students. Results revealed that classroom environments can have an impact on student's social behavior, and that social behaviors are extremely important during the early elementary years. Students can be positively impacted by learning with students of different ages around them, and learning in an environment that best fits them. Results suggest that learning can be accomplished in many different ways and that teachers need to be open to differentiating instruction for all of their many diverse students.

Keywords: Classroom Environment, Social Behaviors, Multiage



Institutional Review Board Decision Tree

Based on your responses, you do not need approval from the IRB.

It looks like your study is exempt because it does not meet the definition of a research activity. Therefore, it does not require approval by the IRB. However, you should follow ethical practices even when just practicing or demonstrating research.



[Refer to 45 CFR 46.102\(d\)](#)

Student researchers may benefit from going through the IRB process even if they are only collecting data to learn techniques.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Multiage classrooms have been on the rise in the United States as more people begin learning about the many benefits that come from placing children in a multiage classroom. The multiage classroom can be classified as having students of different grades interact in an environment that is as natural as possible. It can include kindergarten grades through second, or even third through fifth at times (Bingham, 1995). Researchers generally agree that students in multiage classrooms tend to be better than students in single-grade classes in areas such as social interaction and even in their attitudes toward school. The impact of multiage classroom environments on students and their social behavior is mostly positive.

Students being placed in multiage classrooms are based on choice whether that be by the student or the parent of the student. Since entering a multiage classroom as a student involves the parents to such a degree, most parents like to be involved as often as they can in the classroom as well. Teachers will usually allow for students to be accompanied into the classroom by parents, and parents sometimes can even stay for a while to see what their child does, how they get along with other children, and how they adapt in a multiage classroom environment. In a classroom environment where students can see their parents and teachers being very open to conversation and cooperating with each other, behaviors can be positively altered because students are getting as much positive help at home as they are in the classroom. Once this positive relationship is established between parent and teacher, it is much easier for a teacher to be able to talk with the parent about their child's misbehavior in the classroom and they are able to work together to decide the best form of action in fixing this issue. Because the teacher is the professional in this

situation, it is important for the teacher to make the first move in developing a productive relationship with the parent (Kauffman, 1993).

Social behaviors are the first variable to be examined in this study. In the multiage classroom, younger students and older students' social behaviors couldn't be any more different. But, as time goes on, the younger students are able to see more of how the older students respond and act and they eventually want to imitate that same behavior and apply it to themselves. In a classroom with this much variety in ages, the younger students develop admiration and affection for the older students, and the older students in turn develop a type of protective attitude toward the younger students (Ford, 2016). Research has shown that opposite attraction can cause a balanced and positive environment for both teachers and children. It also can encourage them to be risk takers (MacIntyre, 1998). Plus or furthermore, it has been sensed that stress is minimized in a multiage classroom environment.

The classroom environment is the second variable to be examined in this study. The classroom environment is very important to a child's social behavior because children spend so much time each day in a classroom to learn. The positive impact on students of a multiage classroom environment is much higher than a single-grade classroom environment because single-grade classrooms are small and segregated, whereas multiage classrooms create a sense of community and promote learning as a whole group or "family" (Bingham, 1995). The multiage classroom environment can offer many opportunities for students to be both leaders and followers and this will play a role in how their social behaviors are affected. Students feel a real sense of belonging and confidence and this helps them foster a more positive and happy attitude than students in single-grade classrooms (Ford, 2016). Helping students gain self-confidence is

what a multiage classroom is all about, and teachers cover this aspect through many different ways.

Problem Statement

The impacts of multiage classroom environments have been debated for a few years. A lot of researchers question whether multiage classrooms make enough of a significant positive impact on children to even be an option compared to traditional single-grade classrooms. However, multiage classrooms are still a fairly new topic and many people still have questions as to what multiage is and what benefits on social behaviors and academic achievements can be reaped from placing children in a multiage classroom. Therefore, the problem for this study was to examine the impact of multiage classroom environments on student social behaviors at a selected elementary school.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine whether multiage classroom environments have an impact on social behaviors in students.

Significance

Social behaviors are important in the early elementary school years. Whether a student feels confident and independent or self-conscious and dependent could have a significant effect on the student's academic success and social interactions in the present and future. Determining positive social behaviors early in the school life of a child will later on - in middle school, high school, and even life after school - have an impact on the child's success. In 1972, an article was written about the observance of small boys going from ganging up on their younger playmates to

being careful and tolerant of them. This was thought to be a result of family grouping which is a form of grouping multiage classrooms take advantage of (Ford, 2016). This study will examine whether multiage classroom environments have a large enough effect on students' social behaviors to convince more parents to place their children in a multiage classroom setting at a young age.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. The participants came from one school and therefore results are not generalizable to other schools.
2. The survey used to assess the students' social skills was created by the researcher and not tested for reliability or validity.

Definitions

1. **Classroom Environments-** an environment that is both positive and encouraging, as well as challenging and structured in order to teach students as much as possible.
2. **Multiage Classroom-** consists of more than one grade level, and can be taught by the same teacher for more than just one year. It is designed to be a natural setting to learn in a community.
3. **Social Behaviors-** can be influenced by anything surrounding them or that they are in contact with.

Overview of Study

This research consists of five chapters: Chapter One includes the introduction, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, limitations, definitions of important terms, and an overview of the study; Chapter Two entails a critical review of the literature related to the study; Chapter Three contains the research methods that are used in the study; Chapter Four describes the findings of the study; and Chapter Five contains a brief review of the study, a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

In order to further understand the purpose of this study, a review of the literature was conducted. This chapter contains the findings of the literature review. First, views of multiage classrooms will be highlighted and discussed; secondly the overview of social behaviors will be analyzed; and lastly classroom environments will be discussed. Social Behaviors and Classroom Environments will be discussed in order to find exactly how they impact and will affect a classroom environment in a multiage classroom.

Little research exists on multiage classrooms in recent years. A lot of research has been done in the 90's and early 2000's, where research tells us what a multiage classroom generally is as well as some of the benefits of a multiage classroom. When looking at our history, multiage classrooms were more of what education started out as. When America was just beginning to grow, the example most people imagine is a one-room school with all children attending and learning from the same teacher. The students ages could have ranged from 5-15 at times. As schools became more common, the school system transitioned from multiage classrooms to single-age classrooms. Today, some schools make multiage classrooms an option for a different learning environment, where others simply choose multiage classrooms school wide. The social and natural settings that are enhanced in a multiage classroom can benefit students' social and emotional skills (Song, 2009). Teachers can accomplish this by creating a positive and effective classroom environment for their students.

Multiage classrooms feature a variety of ages of students in the classroom. Some classrooms can be shaped between Kindergarten and Second Grade where others can be Third through Fifth Grade. Multiage classrooms have continuously been studied over the years and some of the most frequent found advantages of multiage classrooms are the idea that older students serve as role models or mentors to help their younger peers, and teachers tend to have better teacher-parent relationships when they've had students for possibly two to three years (Song, 2009). Some disadvantages found in multiage classrooms relate to differing developmental levels among students in the class. However, some may still see differing developmental levels among students as differentiation, which is an aspect multiage classrooms try to apply to benefit each student in their classrooms.

The multiage classrooms have been shaped by the ideas of Maria Montessori. She was an Italian physician and educator best known for Montessori education. Her school design was strongly supportive of certain themes such as shared responsibility, being actively engaged, self-directed, and self-disciplined. Some other details that can relate to multiage classrooms today are things such as not having all of the student desks facing the front of the room. Instead they are positioned around the room in groups and pods in order to promote social interaction among the students. The whole idea of this classroom is to allow choice and differentiation for all learners in that class. The teacher does not just stand at the front of the classroom and lecture to all students. In a Montessori-style classroom the teacher can be seen moving around the room and working with different students while others are working on assignments or centers. Arts and other creative materials are available all around the room for students' use. Storytelling is another huge aspect of multiage classrooms. Montessori's many ideas contributed to what the multiage classroom is today (Thayer-Bacon, 2012).

Multiage Classrooms

Multiage classrooms contain students of all different ages and ability levels. They are all taught together with no divisions between grade levels. Most of the time, student's age ranges are three or more years. Even though all students are taught together, they are all able to approach their own task according to their own developmental level. Teachers make sure that students frequently have opportunities for peer learning. Peer learning or collaborative learning is somewhat of a piece of multiage's foundation because it has to do with what the goal of multiage is. Vygotsky was a firm believer in social interaction and he believed that language can be developed better when students work collaboratively. Vygotsky was a psychologist who created the concept known as zone of proximal development and proposed a theory of the development of higher cognitive functions in children. Through peer teaching, learning can occur when the student explains his or her ideas to other students and takes part in activities in which they he or she too can learn from the other student (Kao, 2011).

Multiage classrooms were a lot more common back in the early 1900's in rural areas of the United States where there were fewer students. Eventually, growing enrollments and the consolidation of school districts led to the traditional single-age classrooms, and multiage classrooms almost disappeared. One of the main benefits of a multiage classroom is security. Security benefits students because they remain stable for two to three years at a time. There is not a lot of change they have to deal with or many different obstacles that they will have to face in those few years in the classroom. Leadership skills are fostered in older children as they help the younger children in multiage classrooms. In turn, the younger children learn from the older ones. Multiage classroom benefits also permit differentiated rates of learning for all students in classroom. A positive outcome of multiage grouping is that children of any age can feel

comfortable giving help in areas in which they have expertise to other children of any age in the classroom (Way, 1979).

Flexible grouping is another great form of peer learning that can be found in a classroom. In a multiage classroom, students will work in a variety of flexible grouping throughout the day. Some examples of flexible grouping in a multiage classroom would be whole-class meetings, teacher-led small groups, student-led small groups, partners, or even just working individually. Student-led small groups are when students get together and form small groups all on their own and work on instructional activities. Teachers will monitor them as they work, and to support positive interaction, the teacher will provide direct instruction on how to "work together" before and during monitoring (Hoffman, 2002).

Albert Bandura is a psychologist known for his Bobo doll experiment and the social learning theory. He did a lot of research on Self-Reinforcement in his career. This theory can be described as having a type of exercise or control over a certain behavior. This behavior can be applied in multiage classrooms because choice is such a huge factor in this type of classroom. Teachers allow their students to make choices based on what is best for them because they want to teach students these types of qualities at a young age so they can only grow from there. Teachers want their students to eventually be able to set their own goals, monitor themselves and evaluate their performance, and basically serve as their own reinforcement agents. The simple thought of having students be able to exercise their own control and take part in rewards when they are finished with their task is an enormous challenge for some young children (Bandura, 1976).

Vygotsky's theories can also be related to multiage classrooms through aspects such as zone of proximal development and social cognitive development (social interaction). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. Following Vygotsky's work, we can understand how talk is essential in the development of thought, and students learn to be reflective by participating in discussion with guidance from others. Processing and reflecting are two aspects that are used all throughout the day in a multiage classroom in so many different ways. Research has also shown how "cooperative learning" is one of the most popular methods used today in schools. There is a great value that can be found in students working in groups without the teacher. Mentoring is another huge aspect that can be found in multiage classrooms. This not only gives students a chance to help others with areas they feel confident in, but it also can build relationships that single-age classrooms cannot do. Students can build relationships with other students that could be two years older or even two years younger. This kind of aspect can have a lot of great benefits when it comes to having a positive classroom environment where learning and development can take place (Chapman, 1995).

Combination classes are types of classes that are often created out of financial necessity rather than a desire to engage students in multiage learning. Most teachers assigned to these kinds of classes do not always have the specialized training needed to fully accommodate and help these students. One fact found about teachers in multiage classrooms is that they have to be passionate about it and be willing to put in a lot of hard work and time. Differentiation was a term that fit combination classes and later was reiterated in the idea of what makes up a multiage classroom. Some researchers also looked at what exactly a multiage program looks like. They describe no markers identifying students into a specific grade level, flexible space, collaborating

among students, and students are able to work at their own pace. A final piece that was looked at when defining a multiage classroom from a combination class was student centered learning. This makes up most of the difference between combination classes and multiage classrooms from single-age classrooms (Harding, 2015).

Social Behaviors

Studies have been done to prove how classroom environments can have an effect on social behaviors in the classroom. It has been proven that a positive classroom environment is essential to keeping behavior problems at a minimum. One of the ways teachers can create a positive classroom environment is by starting the year with high expectations. Another way is to encourage student involvement and make the classroom visually appealing. Getting parents involved and using effective praise and effective feedback are also great ways to create a positive classroom environment and doing so also create positive social behaviors. In order to have these positive expectations, they must be implemented on the first day of school. This kind of implementation will encourage students in your class to behave and act appropriately for the rest of the year. In order to also ensure a positive classroom environment, teachers need to explain why those expectations are so important. Students must also have an input in the development of these expectations. With that being said, this choice is what makes multiage such a positive and encouraging classroom environment. Because multiage classrooms are so bright and inviting, they create a positive environment where students are happy and cheerful and excited to learn. Another way to benefit social behaviors in the classroom according to research is to get the parents involved. By getting the parents involved, teachers are sending the message that what is happening in the classroom is important. This not only will make the parents happy about their child's classroom learning but children will feel more happy knowing their parents are a part of

their learning as well! Effective praise and feedback are two things that should come easily to a teacher. These two factors can have such an influence on a child's happiness and motivation in the classroom. If teachers want to boost their students social behaviors, it begins with creating a positive classroom environment that is enriching, encouraging, and welcoming to all students and parents who enter it (Wilson-Fleming, 2012).

Same-age and multiage groupings can have a huge impact on social behaviors and this was further studied in 2006. This study looked at the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner) which suggested that people with whom an individual spends time with influences how he or she behaves. Research also supported the hypothesis that age-segregated groups might be contributing to the social issues teachers were trying to reduce. Research focused on multiage groupings showed cognitive and social growth for children. In studies that examined the multiage groups of children from families with low incomes, the findings indicated that not only social and academic development were higher but children also had better self-concepts and more positive attitudes toward school than children in same-age groups (Logue, 2006). Not only do multiage classrooms have a better impact on young children's social and academic development, but this research also showed that single-age classrooms cannot have the same exact benefits when it comes to social and emotional development.

Immigration is something that the United States was founded on and it is really interesting to think about how some of these immigrants felt surrounding their school experiences. A study was completed in order to determine whether or not these immigrants really felt "safe" in the United States in school and also how they felt about teaming and multiage grouping. Teaming is a type of practice that involves dividing students into smaller units, each served by a particular group of teachers. The purpose is to create a sense of community between

students that promotes strong and positive relationships with each other as well as adults. Research on teaming has shown that this allowed for students to feel very close with other students as well as their own teachers. Multiage groupings purpose is to benefit emotional and social growth. Multiage classrooms in the past have given students increased confidence and feelings of belonging because they were able to develop friendships with a diverse group of peers. Research also shows that students feel/grow confident because the younger students are able to follow what their older peers are doing and model after them, and older students are able to take on a leadership-type role in the classroom. An interesting result from this study came from the teachers who spoke highly of the teaming system. They felt a definite advantage because each year they got new students, which meant that the immigrants and refugees were not the only new kids in the classroom. One teacher described the three years to be like a "family environment" that was created in the classroom. The final results of this study and answers given by students really determined how well this experiment did. Many students basically said if they felt comfortable around their teacher they felt better about sharing with them. In conclusion, immigrant students need a safe space where they can have a voice and feel comfortable advocating for themselves. This type of interaction is usually found in multiage classrooms (Brinegar, 2010).

Two teachers conducted a study back in 1998 who were both attempting to make a change in their pre-K and pre-first classrooms but were not exactly sure how to start. One teacher wanted to create an age-appropriate program in the school in order to benefit her pre-K class at the time. She felt that her class was not gaining any growth socially because children had no real role models to exhibit any positive behavior. This teacher eventually convinced the other teacher to try and institute this idea into their classrooms together. Baking Buddies was

born! Once a month, the two classes came together to produce service-related food projects. This became a really great success because the children were provided with the role models that they needed and the teachers had the opportunity to test out working together and seeing how it went. After Baking Buddies became such a great success, they next began to investigate the idea of implementing a multiage classroom. They were later approved for a K-1 multiage classroom on a two-year trial run. These teachers still faced many challenges, but overall they felt like their classroom held an age-appropriate environment where children became motivated to take risks and believe they could do anything (MacIntryre, 1998).

A lot of studies have taken place where multiage grouping advantages have been described. One of the major advantages is that students have a greater sense of belonging and security. In a multiage classroom setting, students have a better chance to build relationships with students of different ages than in a traditional classroom setting. Multiage classroom settings provide students with lots of different opportunities to be both a leader and a follower in different situations. Research also says that multiage grouping enhances emotional and social qualities in that younger children get to develop an affection and admiration for the older students, and the older students begin to develop a type of protective sheltering over the younger children (Ford, 1977).

Family grouping is a form of grouping that could be found in multiage classrooms because it is the grouping of students in various ages. In 1972, an article was published that described the concept of family grouping. They considered family grouping to be responsible for the changes seen in a group of small boys who went from ganging up on their younger playmates to being very careful and tolerant of them. Family grouping is a type of concept that would not necessarily get to be taught in a single-age classroom setting simply because there is

not a large enough age range in those classrooms like there is in multiage. Even though research evidence has clearly supported that children in multiage groups have a better attitude toward school and benefit more from the lengthened teacher-child relationships, further research is needed to support these findings (Ford, 1977).

To further expand on how important relationships are in the making of a good classroom environment, there was an article written by a teacher who believed that love, engagement, support and consistency made a recipe for classroom management. She also stated that classroom management is one of the most difficult aspects of an elementary teacher's job. Classroom management consists of practices and procedures that a teacher uses to maintain an environment in which instruction and learning can take place. If teachers do not have good classroom management, they could face loss of instructional time as well as stress and their own personal feelings of inadequacy. Teachers need to love their students and make that a part of their everyday classroom management. Warmth and trust between teachers and students not only can impact behavior in students, but it can also lead to academic success. When students do not feel trusted, then that is when behavior problems will become worse. Being loving and supportive go hand in hand when it comes to working with students. So does engagement and consistency when a teacher is really effective. Effective teachers stay engaged with their students not just when they're in school but also when they're not, and staying consistent means a teacher isn't going to change their mind about a student when they come in and have a bad day. Once again this relates back to trust. If a student does not have trust in a teacher, then a teacher will not be able to have good classroom management and positive social behaviors in their classroom as well (Prior, 2014).

Classroom Environments

Most people will agree that environments can have a huge impact on their well-being. In 2012, some primary schools in Ireland were studied in order to see how the environment could affect the way that teachers and students operated in schools. Previous research gave evidence indicating that school environments can have the potential to enhance student motivation and well-being. In this study they found that having tables in clusters helped facilitate more active and varied learning. They felt this was important because it allows students to work in pairs or in small groups depending on the assignments. From a social point of view, this allows students to make friends more easily. Appropriate lighting was another factor that helped improve teaching and make classrooms a lot more cheerful. Temperature was a factor not many may think about but it could also have a huge effect on whether learning can happen in a classroom. This factor can impact a student's comfort level in the classroom and later learning as well. In conclusion to this study, they learned that physical size matters with teachers and students, lighting had a huge impact on the teachers and students being cheerful, and temperature had a big impact on their comfort level in the classroom (Darmody, 2012).

Effective teaching can play a huge role in both classroom management and social behaviors. An article was written on the effective teaching practices that promote a positive classroom environment. It began by asking the reader to consider what made their most memorable teacher so effective. Effective teaching involves combining academic, behavior, and social aspects in order to achieve a well-balanced classroom. Three of the main areas that were focused on and highlighted in this article were delivering explicit and engaging academic instruction, implementing supported classroom management strategies, and building relationships with students and their families. In addition to creating practices to help assist all

these areas of focus, the teachers worked to differentiate each practice based on their students' needs. When effective teachers can focus on increasing their students' engagement, then they will also help decrease challenging behaviors. When working to implement supported classroom management practices, teachers used explicit instruction to help establish classroom expectations. They also make sure that they show examples of appropriate behaviors during teacher directed instruction so that students know exactly how they are supposed to behave. One of the greatest results to come out of having positive teacher-student relationships is positive classroom behavior. Some examples of ways that can be achieved are things such as simply focusing on direct praise for what is going well with a student or using behavior specific language to objectively talk about an issue or problem. Teachers can also set up times throughout the year where students are celebrated for their academic and behavioral successes in the classroom (MacSuga-Gage, 2012).

Along with social behaviors being a strong influence in the classroom, teachers also can have a big influence as well. A study was done back in 2004 that looked at the influence of teacher experience on an elementary classroom. What they found overall, was that this study showed that the classroom environment influences the student socially, emotionally, and academically. The study used a systems perspective in order to examine the classrooms. What it really came down to was whether or not the school was effective and the teacher was well-seasoned or not. The more experienced teachers had an easier time making sure students' needs were met and had tools to benefit and support cohesiveness, flexibility, and communication in the classroom. Research found that providing support to teachers and information about students' perceptions was successful in improving the classroom environment (O'Connor, 2004).

Morning meetings can also be a big benefit to improving the classroom environment. In 2013, a study was done on the social benefits of a morning meeting. A morning meeting is a classroom meeting that is hosted on a daily basis and works to teach students not just academically but socially and emotionally as well. They believed that hosting these daily morning meetings in the classroom helped build a safe and encouraging environment in the classroom where community, respect, and trust all thrived. Because a lot of schools are putting so much pressure on teachers to get everything accomplished in a short amount of time academically, students are not getting the chance to learn and practice social skills such as empathy, active listening, problem solving, interacting with peers. These skills would all play into a student's social behaviors. Not only do morning meetings create a time for students to learn, but they also create an opportunity for the teacher to model important life skills. This study concluded that if students were taught social skills they would be a lot more successful both academically and socially. Through modeling and having a safe classroom environment, students may develop better social skills along with academics. The *Responsive Classroom* approach was a research-and-evidence-based approach that was discussed also in this study. This approach works to build community and support the growth of practicing and learning important social skills in the classroom. This approach not only increases academic achievement, but it also decreases problem behaviors, and improves social skills. Overall, including morning meets in a daily routine for elementary teachers can only benefit both the classroom environment and social behaviors, and teach students life skills that they will use for the rest of their lives (Allen-Hughes, 2013).

Many people often ask, "So what does effective classroom management look like?" In 2008, research was done in order to show what effective classroom management really is. The

researcher felt that effective classroom management had four main components: management of the physical environment, curriculum management, managing discipline, and managing classroom procedures. What sets this research apart from others was that they worked to define exactly what good classroom management was, and what it was not. Classroom management is more than just exerting control over learning students. It is more about establishing a good climate and managing instruction effectively. Classroom management is more than just implementing procedures or setting rules for a disciplined classroom, it's about how a teacher can establish their authority by offering up interesting lessons. Teachers have to gain students' respect before they will ever be able to teach them anything. They also need to show their concern for students' needs in order to receive respect and trust from students. An effective teacher will know how to encourage good behaviors in their classroom. To break down the four main components of good classroom management they started with the first: management of the physical environment. One of the first things teachers need to do is to make sure their physical environment is safe and comfortable to all students so that they can learn. For management of learning, teachers need to have all of their materials and activities set to meet all of their students' diverse needs. This ensures that all students can still learn in a positive environment. Classroom procedures and rules play an important role in classroom management as well. Teachers need to have guidelines set in order to smoothly and efficiently run their classrooms. Finally, teachers need to set up a discipline system in order to manage difficult behavior and meet the needs of the final component: managing discipline. If teachers can accomplish all four of these parts, then there should be no reason for them not to have effective classroom management (Wai-shing, 2008).

A very unique way to look at multiage classrooms in a different light is to look at the way they interact with other teachers inside a school. In 2016, a study was researched and experimented on an art teacher and multiage homeroom teachers. Many larger multiage classes are taught by teams of teachers that use multiple classroom spaces that connect to form a "house" or pod for the "family". This allows opportunities for rearranging students by their interests, developmental levels, or for subject area instruction. The homeroom teachers usually remain with their students throughout their years so as to build deeper relationships and instructional continuity in a family-like environment. Multiage classroom environments are very "family" centered. They create morning routines so as to develop structure and comfort among students and their homeroom teachers. Instead of having isolated desks, teachers used larger tables in order to reinforce group interaction (Broome, 2016).

Conclusion

To summarize, after reviewing the literature there seems to be a lot of research evidence and opinions that show multiage classrooms or just any classrooms in general to have a very positive impact on social behaviors when they have a well-developed and positive classroom environment. Theorists such as Maria Montessori, Vygotsky, Bandura, and Bronfenbrenner all have done a lot of research in the past that allows us to see what multiage classrooms are really like in comparison to single-age classrooms. They also depict for us how social behaviors and classroom environments can play a huge impact on multiage classrooms and the students learning in them. Even though multiage classrooms have been around a very long time, they have gone in and out of time as far as popularity goes. Now is a time where multiage classrooms are coming back into the picture and teachers and parents are wanting more for their children than just the traditional single-age classroom style that has taken over the past 50 years or so.

Teachers are paying more special attention toward how they can better their classroom by shaking things up. They are moving desks around into pods and tables, they are looking to give it a more comfortable feel with more lamps and less harsh lighting. Parents are expecting their children to receive love, engagement, support, and consistency. They are also expecting teachers to hold high expectations of their students and to always be motivating and encouraging them do more. Research still indicates however that there is still an interest in exploring children in multiage classrooms and their attitudes toward school as well as how the classroom environment may impact that. Hopefully the future will hold even more answers to the ever-evolving subject of multiage classrooms.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a multiage classroom environment on student's social behavior in a multiage classroom.

Population

The population of this study consisted of all students at a selected elementary school. The elementary school was located in Johnson City, TN, which according to the 2010 census had a population of 63,152. This elementary school had a total enrollment of 517.

The elementary school served grades kindergarten through fourth. The students represented all types of income levels and race. The racial breakdown was 82.8% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, 5.8% Asian, and 4.4% African American. Twenty-four percent of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged.

Sample

The sample for this study came from a multiage classroom. The sample consisted of 22 students who were randomly selected from a multiage classroom. All races and genders were used in this study. Of the 22 students, 11 of the students were male and 11 were female. These students were selected based on the classes observed by the researcher at certain times of the day. One of the classes was a combination of kindergarten through second grade skill level, while the other was just a first grade skill level class.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments used for this study consisted of two surveys created by the researcher. The first survey focused on how the students perceived the classroom environment. The survey consisted of a Likert Scale that asked how the students felt about different aspects throughout the classroom that made up the classroom environment. The second survey focused on students social skills. The items in the survey determined the student's social statuses. Observations and interviews were also used in order to substantiate both of the surveys given to the students. Ten students were randomly selected to be interviewed. This also consisted of five boys and five girls. They were asked questions that aligned with the two surveys given to the entire sample. The classroom teacher was also interviewed that aligned with the surveys as well. All of this data was then analyzed for results.

Procedures

Before any research was done, permission was requested and granted from the vice principal of the elementary school. We then received permission from the school board, principal at Lake Ridge, and also the superintendant. After permission was given as to what class would be researched, the researcher visited the classroom and informed the students about the research and explained to them about the survey they would take. A permission form was also sent home to the parents. Students were given a deadline of one week to take the permission forms home to their parents, have it filled out, and returned. Permission was also sought out from Milligan College's Institutional Review Board. After all the permission forms were collected, the study was implemented. The participants were asked to fill out two surveys created by the researcher. The first survey focused on how the students perceived the classroom environment. The second

survey focused on student's social skills. Participants were also observed during class time in order to really understand the interactions that took place and played a part in student's social skills survey. Similarly, ten randomly selected students were interviewed. The questions focused both on classroom environment and social skills. The teacher was also interviewed. Once all data was collected, they were analyzed.

Research Question

Research Question #1: What is the impact of multiage classroom environments on social behaviors of elementary students?

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine how multiage classroom environments can have an impact on social behaviors of elementary students. Social behaviors are important in the early elementary school years. Whether a student feels confident and independent or self-conscious and dependent could have a significant effect on the student's academic success and social interactions in the present and future. In 1972, an article was written about the observance of small boys going from ganging up on their younger playmates to being careful and tolerant of them. This was thought to be a result of family grouping which is a form of grouping multiage classrooms take advantage of (Ford, 2016). Both parents and educators should be aware of how a multiage classroom environment can have an impact on their students' social behavior. This study shows that multiage students are not only impacted by their classroom environment, but also by the people around them.

Data Collection

The data for this qualitative study consisted of observations, two surveys created by the researcher, and interviews with both students and the teacher. The data were collected to describe how and why the students' social behaviors at a selected school can be impacted by a multiage classroom environment. Twenty-two students from an elementary school in northeast Tennessee were used to collect data. Of the 22 students, 11 of the students were male and the other 11 were female. Ten of the 22 students were randomly selected to be interviewed. Of the ten students, five were male and five were female. The teacher that was interviewed has been

teaching for 24 years and holds a Bachelor of Science in Education. The demographic profile of the students participating in this study are displayed in Table 1.

The researcher conducted naturalistic observations of the multiage classroom setting. The observations included ways the students learned, how they treated other students around them, and how the overall mood was in the classroom about being at school. Two surveys were used for this study (see Appendix A), one was about social behaviors and the other was about the classroom environment. There were ten questions on both surveys, and they asked students either direct questions about how things involving the classroom made them feel, or specific questions describing what their classroom environment was like. Both surveys were formatted to a Likert Scale. Students would read a statement, and then they would circle a number between 1-5. If they circled 1, then they strongly disagreed with the statement, 5 would be strongly agree, and 3 would be neutral/indifferent. Interviews (see Appendix B) were also conducted with ten students, five males and five females. The teacher was also interviewed on how she felt about the classroom, and how it affected students.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Participating Students

Gender	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percent (%)
Male	11	50.00
Female	11	50.00
Total	22	100.00

Research Question

One research question was used to guide the analysis of the data collected. The research question was as follows:

What is the impact of multiage classroom environments on social behaviors of elementary students?

To answer this research question, four instruments were used to collect data, and the data were examined and analyzed. These instruments consisted of two surveys, observations, and interviews.

Results Derived from Observations:

When observations were made, three trends emerged. Trend 1 indicated that the students were very conscientious to time and knew around what time exactly they would switch to go to another class. This was rather impressive to observe being that these are kindergarten, first, and second graders. It was quite obvious that the teachers had spent a lot of time going over routines and schedules with them for them to be so well-adjusted to moving around so much throughout the day.

Trend 2 related to how the students treated each other and behaved around their peers. The researcher found that age was not a factor in who was friendly with who in their classes. The researcher observed two different types of classes: one being homeroom and the other was ELA Lab/Math. The homeroom class was made up of kindergarten, first, and second grade students where the ELA Lab/Math class was made up of students at the first grade skill level. In homeroom, many of the students were friendly with all of the students in the class, not just the

students in their grade level. The researcher observed how the teacher would purposely pair students up to buddy read with someone who was not in their grade level and a lot of the time the students would be excited about it rather than not. Many of the second graders would love to read with the kindergarteners because they could help them when they would come up to some tough words or sentences. The kindergarteners in turn, would also love to read with second graders and receive all the help they could get. This shows a trend that only a multiage setting can produce. Having students of multiple ages and grade levels can bring about a sense of respect and understanding for other people besides just themselves. In the ELA Lab/Math class, the researcher observed that they grouped students based on skill level. The class being observed was considered first grade skill level. The researcher noted that even though students were in a first grade skill level, they still could be different ages. By calling it a skill level rather than grade, they protect students from being ridiculed by other kids for being held back. It also keeps younger children from bragging about being a lot smarter if they skip ahead to a new skill level.

Trend 3 indicated that the students' mood was overall positive about being at school. The majority of students observed were always in high spirits and happy to be around their teachers and peers. Because of the set up in the multiage classrooms, all of the students get to spend time with students in other classes throughout the day. Multiage teachers make it a routine to do activities together including recess and lunch time. This allows the students to make friends with more than just the students in their classroom. The teachers are very involved in students' personal lives. The researcher observed that the teachers have weekly meetings where they take time to discuss what the students did over the weekend, and also to allow students to voice concerns with anything going on both inside and outside of the classroom. All of these factors add up to the positive mood that all students reflect in the multiage classroom setting.

Results Derived from Survey of Social Behaviors:

There were five trends that emerged when the data from this particular survey was analyzed. Trend 1 showed that 86% of the students strongly agreed that going to school is very important to them. This says a lot about their learning environment, as well as teachers and peers that surround them every day at school. Trend 2 showed that 68% of the students really like getting to help students that are younger than them. This is an attribute that makes up what is so unique about a multiage classroom. In multiage classrooms, the classes are blended between Kindergarten and Second grade. This combination allows students to help teach students that are younger than them at times. Trend 3 was similar to Trend 2 in that it showed that 69% of the students like receiving help from older students. This is another attribute that makes multiage classrooms so special because students can both give and receive help from peers in the classroom. Figure 1 shows the percentage of students who prefer helping younger students to students who enjoy receiving help from students that are older than them.

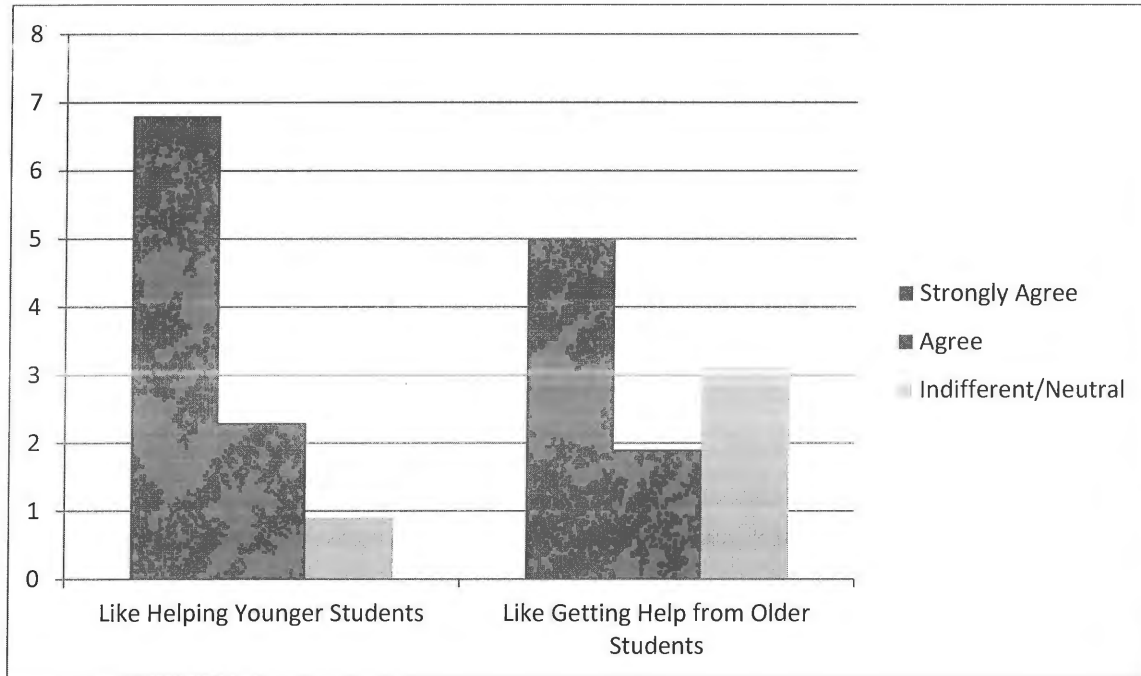


Figure 1: Percentage of Students who Prefer Helping Younger Students and who Like Getting Help from Older Students

Trend 4 was based on technology. It showed that 77% of the students voiced their strong opinion in enjoying learning with technology. One of the interesting things about multiage is how they really try and be as current as they can with new activities and ways of teaching. The final trend found in this survey was that 72% of the students felt that the classroom arrangement helps them learn better. This trend is very crucial because the classroom arrangement is also what makes multiage so unique.

Results Derived from Survey of Classroom Environment:

There were four trends that emerged when the data from the Classroom Environment survey were analyzed. Trend 1 showed that the students work in groups quite frequently throughout the day. There were 81% of students who strongly agreed with this statement in the

survey. Trend 2 focused on the amount of color found in the classrooms. The multiage classroom is set up in pods, meaning there are four separate rooms that are all connected by a hallway/room in the center. There were 72% of the students who felt that their rooms were very colorful and engaging. This contributes to multiage's goal of being very colorful and interesting. The classrooms are also colorful in the hopes that it brings about positive emotions and feelings related to school. Trend 3 had to do with the amount of noise and distraction that can happen in the classroom. About 81% of the students felt strongly that the classroom can get too loud sometimes, as well as crazy. This kind of distraction comes when you have about 80 students split up into four pod rooms that are all connected. Trend 4 was similar to Trend 3 in that 81% of the students also felt that the classroom can get very "crazy" sometimes. When there are four pods all connected by a center hall and a total of 80 students split up, the classroom can get very "crazy" at times and hard to focus. These trends show that even when the classroom setting is colorful and group-work friendly, it can also become very loud and crazy at times and be somewhat of a distraction to learning.

Results Derived from Interviews:

When interviews were conducted, two trends emerged. The first trend came from how the students felt about the classroom environment having an effect on their learning. Half of the students interviewed stated that they did not feel that the environment had an effect on their learning because they could "just block out the distractions". Others stated that they were "used to distractions going on" and so were able to block out noise and busy activities going on around them. The other half of the students felt that the classroom environment did have an effect on their learning due to loud noises, bright lights and other busy activities going on around them. Some said, "Noise is the most distracting thing to me" while others stated that "if it's too cold, I have a hard time paying attention". Some big factors that continued to be mentioned about the

environment were things such as loud noise, bright lights, and really extreme temperatures.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students who felt the classroom environment had an effect on their learning versus the students who did not.

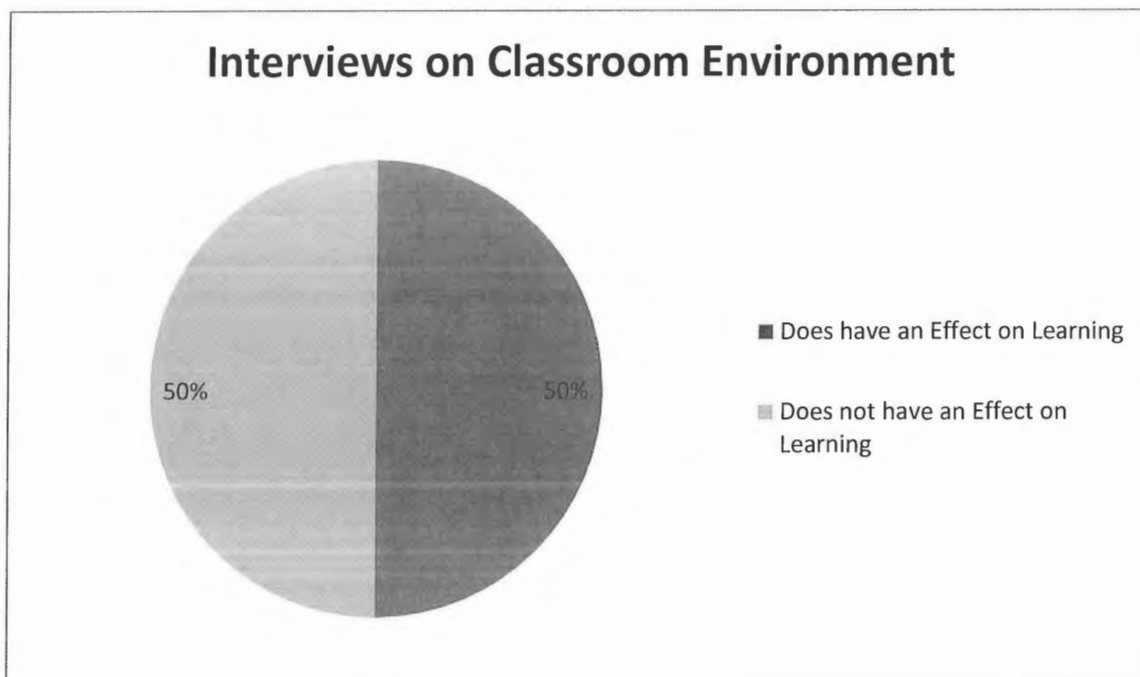


Figure 2: Percentage of Students who feel the Classroom Environment has an Effect on their Learning

The second trend dealt with how the students felt about being in Multiage and why they felt that way. Trend 2 can be summed up simply by saying "Multiage is like one big family." A lot of the students when being interviewed continued to say how they loved being in Multiage for more than one year, and they also felt like the whole of Multiage is one big happy family because they all participate in things together. "Family" is a word that all teachers in Multiage prefer to use when talking about all of the classes.

The interview with the teacher resulted in similar conclusions as the students. She felt that the classroom environment can have an effect on your learning. She also felt like bright lights can be an issue and cause headaches or distractions when trying to learn. Noise is also a factor that can have an impact on whether students even hear what the teacher is instructing them to do. The teacher gave a lot of praise to the uniqueness of the Multiage classroom setting. She feels that it is a great setting to build social skills, learn from others, and get a great education as well. The teacher said, "Multiage is a much faster-paced setting, so there is a lot more learning and work accomplished in such a small amount of time." This type of classroom setting not only forces you to learn quicker, but to also learn with more diverse learners, some of them being younger or older than other students they are learning with. Multiage is a classroom environment where students can learn and enjoy the freedom of being involved with more than just one specific classroom or grade.

Chapter 5

Findings, Recommendations, and Implications

Introduction

This chapter includes a summary of the findings, recommendations for further research, and implications of this study. This research study was based on the review of the literature that identified the impact that classroom environments can have on social behaviors of students. The results of the study were also based on the data analysis described in Chapter 4.

Summary of Findings

The major question addressed in this study was what kind of impact Multiage classroom environments can have on student social behaviors. There were several significant trends that emerged from the four instruments used to collect data for this research. The four data collection instruments included two surveys, observations, and interviews.

Three significant trends emerged from the results derived from observations. The first trend indicated that the students in multiage were very conscientious to time and knew where to be and what time they would switch to all of their classes. The students have to be very good listeners in order to know where to go, especially when there are no bells to signal when they are to switch classes. That is a type of conditioning that doesn't just get learned overnight. These teachers have to put in a lot of work explaining where to go, when to go, and what to be prepared with.

The second trend showed that students gain a lot of respect for each other in the classroom. Age is not a factor in who hangs out with who or is friendly to. In this particular

multiage setting, the students are blended between grades Kindergarten through Second. This means that a lot of second graders work with kindergarteners and kids of different ages get paired up to work together at times. The researcher observed at one time that the teacher purposely paired students up to buddy read with someone who was not in their grade level. Naturally, one might expect them to be upset about it, but many of them loved it. This is one of the many things that make Multiage so unique.

The third trend indicated that the students' mood was overall positive about being at school. The researcher observed that students were always in high spirits and happy to be around teachers and peers. Multiage classrooms are a bit different from the traditional classroom in that they combine a lot of the classrooms sometimes when learning a particular lesson or doing a specific activity. This allows all of the students to work together and collaborate on different things. The researcher also observed that the teachers carry out weekly meetings with their homerooms where they discuss what the students did over the weekend, as well as give students a voice to talk about any kind of concern going on both inside and outside of school. This kind of environment definitely allows the students to be happy where they are and truly enjoy the school experience.

Five trends emerged from the data based on the social behaviors survey. The first trend showed that students feel that going to school is very important to them. In Multiage, students are able to enjoy and partake in a lot of things a traditional classroom can't do. Multiage has an open door policy with family and so parents will come and eat in the classroom during lunch time. Students are also allowed to go and see other teachers if they are struggling with something and either need some extra help or someone to talk to with a different perspective. Because

Multiage is so open and cares about their students, this causes 86% of the students to strongly agree that going to school is very important to them.

The second trend and third trend were very similar. One trend showed how some students really like getting to help students that are younger than them. The other trend showed a percentage of students who like receiving help from older students. This is one of those aspects that again makes Multiage so unique. Because Multiage is blended, there are a lot more opportunities for older students to help the younger students with reading, or with showing leadership in what is expected of them in the classroom, or just being a friend. In turn, the younger students are able to learn from the older students and then later on take on the same role in mentoring younger students when they are the older ones a couple years later.

The fourth trend was based on technology and what the students felt about it being used in the classroom. As classrooms are finding more ways to use technology in every day lessons, it's important to get feedback from the students on what they like and don't like. Out of the students surveyed, 77% of the students strongly agreed that they enjoy teachers using technology when teaching them lessons. This percentage can really show teachers not only what the students like, but also maybe how they learn best. The younger generations are becoming much quicker at catching on to the latest technology, and so if a teacher tries to use those means to teach them, then they will see how well the students are comprehending the lesson and also learning best.

The fifth trend indicated that the classroom arrangement can really have an effect on student learning. In Multiage, the classroom arrangement is very different from a traditional classroom. There are four classrooms or pods, and they are all connected by a center hallway. That means that most students and teachers get used to always having a sort of background

noise. Each classroom is arranged based on how the teacher feels will best accommodate the students. The classroom arrangement observed by the researcher showed grouped seating around the room. There was also a carpet where the students would sit for whole group learning. The teacher also had a small round table where she carried out small group work or guided reading activities. Based on the survey, 72% of the students felt that this particular arrangement helps them to learn better. These results can concur that classroom arrangement is very important and crucial to a student's learning and well-being at school.

Four trends emerged from the data gathered using the survey on classroom environment. The first trend indicated what kind of grouping the teacher allowed during learning. Based on the survey, 81% of the students marked that they frequently work in groups throughout the day. This trend can indicate that multiage teachers work hard to shake things up in classes and use different ways of teaching and differentiating for students.

The second trend focused on the look of the classroom. Out of all the students surveyed, 72% of the students felt that their rooms were very colorful and engaging. Colorful classrooms can have a very positive impact on students and correlate to how they even feel about going to school every day. All of the Multiage classrooms are very colorful and are unique in that they represent what the class is all about and even what they are currently learning about.

The third and fourth trend both indicated the kinds of distractions that can be found in a Multiage classroom setting. About 81% of the students felt that the classroom felt that the classroom can get too loud at times as well as "crazy". In a Multiage classroom, noise can definitely be a distraction when there are about 80 students all placed in four rooms connected by

a center room. That is something that can't be fixed other than teachers working with their students on respecting other students and keeping their voices at a reasonably low level.

When interviews were conducted, two important trends emerged. The first trend indicated how students felt the classroom environment could have an impact on their learning. Half of the students interviewed felt that the environment did not have an effect on their learning because they could just "block out the distractions". The other half of the students felt that the classroom environment did have an effect on their learning due to loud noises, bright lights and other activities going on around them. This kind of impact can relate back to how a Multiage classroom environment can not only have an impact on a students learning, but also their behavior in school. Students that can focus through anything may have more positive feelings surrounding school than students who cannot.

The second trend indicated how students felt about being placed in Multiage rather than a traditional classroom. Almost all of the students interviewed could be quoted saying "Multiage is like one big family." Students loved that they could be in Multiage for more than just one year, hence a reason why they all felt like family. They also felt like the amount of participation all four of the classes do together helped them feel more like a family as well.

Conclusion

The results of this study confirmed that multiage classroom environments can have an impact on social behaviors of elementary students. These results also showed that social behaviors are extremely important in the early elementary school years. The trends in this study show that educators should be aware of how every aspect of their teaching can have an impact on any of their students.

Recommendations

1. Future research should include a wider variety of schools in order to get a better idea of how Multiage classrooms from different school systems teach and how their methods work in their environment.
2. Future research should include other kinds of classroom environments such as Montessori or single age classes to see how students learn in there compared to a Multiage environment.
3. Future research should include a study of older students in a Multiage classroom setting to see if their learning styles or behaviors are any different from younger students.
4. Future research should include following a group of students leaving the Multiage classroom environment and going in to a traditional single age setting and how they adjust to that new environment.

Implications

1. All educators should be aware that learning can be accomplished in many different ways and that they need to be open to differentiating for all of their many diverse students.
2. Parents should be aware that Multiage classroom environments are very different from a traditional classroom and can have a very positive impact on their child and their learning.
3. Students can be positively impacted by learning with students of different ages around them, and learning in an environment that best fits them.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Student Surveys

Survey of Classroom Environment

Answer the following by circling a number between 1-5.

1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

- | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lights in my classroom are too bright. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2 | We work in groups throughout the day in my classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3 | We listen to a lot of music in my classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4 | My classroom is very colorful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5 | My classroom is kept well clean. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | We use computers often in our learning. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7 | We get breaks from learning throughout the school day. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8 | Sometimes my classroom can get too loud. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9 | The classroom is always really cold. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10 | The classroom can be very crazy sometimes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Survey of Social Behaviors

Answer the following by circling a number between 1-5.

1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

- | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Going to schools is very important to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2 | I like getting to help out students who are younger than me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3 | I like getting assistance from students that are older than me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4 | I always complete my school work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5 | When I come to school, I am ready to learn. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | I enjoy learning the technology. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7 | I love when my teacher puts us into groups to work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8 | I like going to see different teachers throughout my school day to learn. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9 | The way my classroom is arranged helps me to learn better. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10 | Listening to music helps me learn better. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Appendix B
Student Interview Questions

Student Interview Questions

1. How did you like the survey? Why?
2. Did you like the one about your classroom better or about you?
3. What was one question that stood out to you the most?
4. Do you feel like the classroom environment has an effect on your learning?
5. Do you like being in Multiage? Why?