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Teaching Art in a Multi-Age Elementary Environment

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By

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This dissertation is dedicated to *mi amore e mi vida,*
Monica and Mackenzie

And in memory of Nancy Pratt Broome and Dona Rexrode,
to whom my dedication to such work did not allow me to say
my proper goodbyes
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ABSTRACT

This study was an exploration into the qualities that characterize visual art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts from the State of Florida. Multi-age learning environments at the elementary level are defined as the purposive grouping of students from two or more traditional grade levels in order to form a classroom community of learners. During the past 40 years, multi-age education has been examined in literature and research in many different ways and contexts. In the subject area of visual art, however, little literature can be found that addresses the practice of multi-age art instruction. This study begins to rectify that situation through the use of qualitative research methods that incorporate survey, observation, and interview techniques.

A written survey was mailed to all of the elementary level multi-age art educators in Florida’s public school systems that were located through the use of a snowball sampling technique. The surveys were used as a way to collect broad contextual information on the practices and perceptions of the identified art teachers. From the survey results, a single multi-age art teacher was selected for qualitative observations in order to study the situation in depth. The selected art teacher was observed for approximately 25 hours as she delivered art instruction to mixed-age groups of students at her school. Three interviews were also conducted with the art teacher in order to collect data from the participant’s own words and to better understand the meaning that multi-age art instruction held for her. The data collected from the close-ended survey questions was carefully tabulated before being transferred into descriptive statistics, frequency tables, and bar graphs. The data from the open-ended survey questions, observations, and interviews underwent careful content analysis, coding, and structural corroboration before findings were presented in the form of qualitative narratives and descriptive statistics.

The results of data analysis showed that most multi-age art classes consisted of two or three consecutive grade level combinations that were primarily taught by teams of teachers. Overall, the art teachers did not play a large role in the organizational structure of their multi-age art classes in comparison to the decisions of homeroom teachers. The surveyed art teachers were shown to be very diverse in terms of their descriptive backgrounds. The art teachers’ most common characteristics included that most of them had not received multi-age training and almost none of them had been given a choice as to their willingness to participate in nongraded
art instruction. In spite of the lack of training and the lack of professional autonomy offered to
the art educators, the majority of them tended to support the use of multi-age groupings in their
art rooms. The use of thematic instruction and scaffolding techniques resonated equally well in
the art room as it did in multi-age homerooms and in multi-age literature. An emerging pattern
in the survey responses and in qualitative data indicated that multi-age art instruction, on a
functional level, may not have to be that different from art instruction in traditional graded
programs. The most frequently expressed advantage of multi-age art instruction related to the
model’s use of scaffolding techniques, such as peer tutoring, peer assistance, and cooperative
grouping. The most frequently expressed disadvantage related to the presence of differing
developmental levels in the art room that were difficult to reach because the levels varied too
greatly.

The findings of this study were used to develop nine recommendations for fostering
multi-age models of art education in Florida schools that may be interested in refining or
organizing nongraded structures. The recommendations included suggestions for art teachers,
homeroom teachers, and also organizers of multi-age education as mutual stakeholders in
creating equitable models of mixed-age instruction. The research project concluded that multi-
age art education does not have to operate that differently from traditional models of art
instruction on a functional level. On a conceptual level, however, multi-age art education can be
quite different. The study concluded with the introduction of a proposed continuum of
development for multi-age art educators. The continuum presents options for nongraded art
teachers to explore that range from functional possibilities to a fully formed conceptual model of
multi-age art education. While art teachers can enter into the continuum at any point that they
feel comfortable, the overall appropriate goal for organizers of multi-age education should be to
encourage art teachers to eventually adopt the conceptual model presented at the far end of the
developmental continuum.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Early in my career as a public school art teacher, I was fortunate enough to be hired on several occasions as an educational consultant or workshop presenter at staff development trainings and school district conferences. Usually I was hired to discuss the use of thematically integrated lessons within an art curriculum. At one particular conference, I was asked to give my usual presentation to a group of teachers who were being trained on the topic of multi-age education, an alternative model for organizing schools that I had not been introduced to in my own preservice experiences in art education. While I had been given enough background information prior to the conference to know that thematic integration was a key component to multi-age education, I still wondered why this was my first formal exposure in a staff development setting to the possibilities of instruction in mixed-age learning environments. What exactly is multi-age education? Why did my preservice preparation in art education, which I believed to be very thorough, fail to introduce me to this topic? Are there significant practical and conceptual connections between multi-age education and art education? My overall curiosity toward these considerations was intensified when I learned that there were not any art educators present at this particular conference on multi-age education. The conference participants who did attend my specific breakout session included a music educator, a few administrators, and some homeroom teachers who were interested in integrating art into their overall general curricula. I wondered what roles, if any, art educators could play in multi-age teaching situations.

Over the next few years, I continued to wonder about multi-age art education. When opportunities presented themselves, I attempted to seek out and communicate with art teachers who worked in schools where multi-age models of organization had been implemented. In this process, I noticed that many of these art teachers held varying opinions on the subject while others were uncertain of their opinions all together. I wondered what a larger perspective on the subject of multi-age art education might reveal. When I returned to graduate school years later as a doctoral student of art education, I continued to pursue my curiosity in multi-age art instruction. Courses in research methodology provided me the opportunity to observe multi-age classrooms and a multi-age art room in person (Broome, 2003), but did not provide me with the
broad holistic view I was seeking. If anything, this experience peaked my curiosity further and I wondered just exactly how art instruction in multi-age learning environments could be characterized. This research project details my efforts to satisfy this ongoing problem as it grew out of my own experiences as an art educator, educational consultant, and beginning researcher.

Grouping students by grade level has been the predominant organizational structure of U.S. elementary schools for over 150 years (Goodlad & Anderson, 1959/1987; Hillson, 1969; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). While some educators appear satisfied with the traditional graded environment in which they work, there are those educators and administrators who continue to seek a paradigm shift in the structural organization of the traditional elementary school system. Such professionals may turn to multi-age models of instruction in order to find a more effective way to scaffold students’ learning.

Multi-age learning environments at the elementary level are loosely defined as the purposive grouping of students from two or more traditional grade levels in order to form a classroom community of learners (Kasten & Clarke, 1993). Students within a multi-age class still move from easier to more difficult concepts as guided by their instructor, but this movement occurs at a pace that is not determined only by their age or grade level. Literature about multi-age elementary classrooms first became prominent between the years of 1955 and 1975 and has since seen a major spurt in activity beginning in the 1990s (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). Throughout this time period, however, little research or literature has been developed to aid visual art, music, dance, and physical education instructors who may be servicing classes in schools where the multi-age model has already been organized.

To begin to rectify this lack of information, the purpose of this study is to see what qualities characterize visual art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts from the State of Florida. Based on these findings, suggestions will be made for structuring and implementing multi-age art education at the elementary level in Florida schools.

**Statement of the Problem**

Teachers working in multi-age learning environments require staff development training and access to research about the best practices of multi-age instruction in order to prepare for their own nongraded classrooms (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Appalachia Educational Laboratory,
1991; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). After conducting an extensive review of salient literature on multi-age education and art education, I found that little research or literature exists to prepare visual art teachers for multi-age art instruction. The research problem, in this context, centers on the overall lack of resources and information available about multi-age art education. As such, the purpose of this study is to qualitatively characterize the nature of multi-age art instruction at the elementary level in public school systems from the State of Florida. In this process, I collected and analyzed descriptive information on the act of preparing for and instructing multi-age groups in the art classroom. Additionally, I analyzed the perceived advantages and disadvantages of multi-age art instruction as expressed by multi-age art teachers. My examination also explores multi-age art teachers themselves, their philosophical orientations, as well as the nature of their experiences as art educators who work in mixed-age environments. Based on these findings, I make suggestions for implementing and structuring multi-age art education at the elementary level in Florida schools and, as a result, begin the process of filling in a missing gap in art education research and multi-age literature.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question providing focus for the study is: *What qualities characterize art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts in the State of Florida, and what are the implications for fostering, and implementing multi-age art education in those and other Florida schools?*

To answer and augment the primary question, several supporting questions have been developed:

1. How are multi-age models of art education organized and structured at the elementary level?
2. Who are the selected multi-age art teachers and what is the nature of their experience as art educators who teach elementary school students organized in nongraded groups?
3. What advantages and disadvantages are there for selected art educators engaging in multi-age instruction?
4. How do the purposes of the art educators and the classroom teachers engaged in multi-age education support or conflict with each other?
Justification of the Study

While the organizational structure of U.S. elementary schools has remained more or less the same for over 150 years (Goodlad & Anderson, 1959/1987; Hillson, 1969; Tyack & Cuban, 1995), that is not necessarily to say that the system has remained the same because it is working so well. Some educational theorists and scholars claim that all is not well with schooling in the United States and suggest that changes are needed in terms of the organizational structure of schools and the way that students progress from one grade level to another (Chapman, 2005; Eisner, 1998b; Schlechty, 1990). Schlechty (1990) called for the restructuring of U.S. schools since the system’s operational and organizational structure was largely based on the industrial assembly line of the 19th century. While the assembly line model has seen major modification or abandonment in the realm of business, it continues to persist in U.S. schools in the form of grade level promotion and retention. According to Schlechty, such an outdated model of instruction does not teach children to think creatively or critically and therefore does not prepare students for the world of ideas they will be entering as adults.

Eisner (1998b) expressed concern over the educational trend of creating uniform standards, goals, or grade level benchmarks to be applied to all students across the United States. Such policies and lock-step standards seem to contradict the variability involved in natural human development.

The tidy structure that was invented in the nineteenth century to rationalize school organization may look wonderful on paper, but it belies what we know about the course of human development. Because we still operate with a developmentally insensitive organizational structure in our schools, the appeal of uniform standards by grade level or by outcome seems reasonable. It is not. Variability, not uniformity, is the hallmark of the human condition. (Eisner, 1998b, p. 185)

Eisner’s (1998b) concerns about a uniform standards-driven curriculum for the United States may be exacerbated by the federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The law was partially enacted in order to enforce stricter measures of standards and academic accountability for public schools across the nation. Chapman (2005) examined the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 in its entirety for the purpose of understanding the law’s vision, its association with political movements, and the implications
that it holds for K-12 educational institutions in the United States. Among many conclusions, Chapman found that the law encouraged a reduction in the variability of teaching methods, emphasized punishment over rewards, implied that instructors should teach to the content of standardized tests, and held negative implications for those who support or instruct arts within school systems. Chapman noted that the administration of high-stakes tests tied to the law could also result in negative psychological effects for the students who take these standardized exams. In Chapman’s analysis, the No Child Left Behind Act is depicted as the guiding force behind an educational accountability movement that “envisions schools as factories for learning with no child left behind on the assembly line” (p.12).

Considering the bleak view that some scholars paint of educational affairs in the United States, it seems only natural to wonder what alternatives exist for U.S. education. While many school reform movements have come and gone over time (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), the multi-age reform movement within public school systems has survived for over forty years in the United States and continues to be practiced as a viable alternative to the traditional graded model of elementary classroom organization (B. Miller 1990). During that time period, multi-age classrooms have been examined in educational research and literature in many different ways and contexts. These analyses include, but are not limited to, qualitative examinations of multi-age and multi-grade classrooms (Kasten & Clarke, 1993; B. Miller, 1991), the first hand accounts of multi-age homeroom teachers (Chase & Doan, 1994; Connell, 1987; Miletta, 1996) and principals of multi-age schools (Hart, 1962; Smith, 1968, 1970), suggestions for implementing multi-age models of instruction (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Kasten & Lolli, 1998), and studies comparing multi-age classrooms to traditional graded classrooms in terms of academic achievement, student attitude (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; B. Miller, 1990; Pratt, 1993), and students’ perceptions of their teachers (Carbone, 1961).

Among the literature on multi-age education, research studies can be found that address the effectiveness of such nongraded grouping strategies when engaging students in specific subject areas, such as math (Bell, Zipursky, & Switzer, 1976; Carbone, 1961; Connell, 1987; Hart, 1962; Henn, 1975), science (Brooks, 1973), spelling (Halliwell, 1963; Ingram, 1960), and reading or language arts (M. J. Anderson, 1981; Bell et al., 1976; Carbone, 1961; Connell, 1987; Halliwell, 1963; Henn, 1975; Higgins, 1981; Ingram, 1960; Ricciotti, 1983). In the subject area of visual art, however, little literature can be found that addresses the practice of multi-age art
instruction. So while multi-age education continues to be implemented in many U.S. schools, the visual art teachers at these schools have few resources to draw from when those multi-age groups arrive in their classrooms week after week for art instruction. Art teachers working in multi-age environments could benefit from new research that would aid them in their planning and decision-making processes. Investigations into the nature of multi-age art education could complement previous studies on multi-age classrooms by exploring this model of school organization through the relatively ignored lens of art educators.

I have chosen to study multi-age art education at the elementary level due to its relevance in that context. Most programs of instruction at the middle and high school levels contain courses known as electives. Middle and high school students are often allowed to select their own electives, which frequently include visual art classes, based upon their individual interests. This grouping of students by interest level frequently results in classes of mixed-age groups. It is also common at the high school level for students to encounter many mixed-age settings in their coursework. Guidance counselors and other advisors often academically track high school students in order to place them in courses that reflect their achievement and ability levels. Students at both the high school and middle school levels experience bells, transitions, and multiple teachers within a day. While nongradedness at the middle school and high school levels has been explored within literature (Jenkins, 1971; Lee, 1971; Telfer, 1971), such cases do not seem to deviate far from the normal situations experienced by art teachers at those levels. Kasten and Clarke (1993) imply that there is no other place in life, except the elementary school, where children are so strictly segregated by age and limited to contact only with those of the same age group. I have decided to explore multi-age art education at the elementary level due to the particularly rigid structure that graded models of instruction have at that level.

I have also decided to study multi-age art education within the context of public elementary schools rather than private institutions of learning. I made this decision because private schools can often bypass state and federally mandated testing and accountability movements established strictly by grade level (Chapman, 2005). Some teachers perceive multi-age models of instruction to have poor fit with accountability measures that are tied to the administration of standardized tests at specific grade levels, and therefore may feel that such tests and standards are impediments to the implementation of multi-age education (Cushman, 1993). Investigating multi-age teachers at private schools, where such state-mandated grade level
standards may not exist, could diminish the authenticity of my findings for the greatest number of practitioners in art education, namely, public school art teachers. I have decided to eliminate multi-age teachers working in private schools from my study as a way not to overlook or diminish the concerns and complexities that may be facing those that work in public school settings in Florida.

**Scope of the Study**

The procedures of the research study framed as objectives were to:
1. Critically review the existing, related literature on multi-age art education in order to create a foundation or framework for the study.
2. Critically review the existing literature on research methods in order to formulate a workable research strategy and theoretical framework for the study.
3. Develop and implement the research by using survey, observation, and interview strategies and instruments.
4. Examine, analyze, and interpret the findings as applied to the purposes and guiding questions presented by the study.
5. Draw implications for those who plan multi-age programs of instruction and for art educators who are teaching in or may consider teaching in multi-age learning environments at the elementary level.

**Research Design**

I answered my research questions and examined the qualities that characterize multi-age art education by using the data collection instruments and techniques of written surveys, observations, interviews, and analysis. First I sent out a survey to all of the elementary-level, public school multi-age art educators in the State of Florida that I could locate as a way to collect broad, contextual information on their practices and perceptions as nongraded art instructors. Then I selected a multi-age art teacher and observed her nongraded teaching practices. I also conducted several interview sessions with the selected multi-age art teacher.

Questionnaires and surveys are a commonly used mode of data collection when obtaining information on characteristics, behaviors, perceptions, recommendations, or practices within larger populations (Babbie, 2004; Hutchinson, 2004). In the case of this research project, surveys were sent to multi-age art teachers working in public elementary schools throughout the
State of Florida. The survey gathered contextual information on the background of the multi-age art teachers, descriptive information on their multi-age teaching practices, and information about their perceptions and philosophical orientations toward art education and multi-age education.

While survey methods were used to describe the broad context of multi-age art instruction, other research methods were also used within the study to further describe the act of multi-age art teaching, itself (Schutz, Chambless, & DeCuir, 2004). As such, the survey research methods were mixed with the methods of qualitative observations and interviews in order to provide the study with breadth, depth, confirmation, and elaboration. Since such a multimethods approach required the selection of a multi-age art program to observe, the results of the survey were also used as a tool for purposively choosing a qualitative observation site based upon the degree of the program’s nongradedness, the presence of typical characteristics cited in multi-age literature, and the willingness of the art teacher to participate in observations and interviews. So while the surveys provide an aggregate of contextual information on multi-age art instruction, a single case also allows readers to vicariously experience a specific or unique multi-age art program (Donmoyer, 1990) that typifies the characteristics described in multi-age literature.

The next phase of the research design, then, centered on the rich description of the classroom practices of the selected multi-age art teacher and the meanings that this act holds for the selected participant. Research studies that are field-focused and involve the detailed description of the actions and interactions of humans with each other and their environment on a day-to-day basis are described as qualitative in nature (Eisner, 1998a). Qualitative researchers spend considerable time observing phenomenon and collecting data in natural settings. In this process, the qualitative researcher often sorts through collected observations and interviews to see what emerges from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). A large part of my research methodology focused on the first-hand naturalistic observations of a selected multi-age art classroom, the gathering of fieldnotes during these observations, and the collection of in-depth interviews with the art teacher who has been observed. The findings from the qualitative observations and interviews were corroborated and compared with the findings from the survey research in order to reach conclusions of both contextual breadth and qualitative depth (Schutz et al., 2004).
Limitations and Assumptions

As a qualitative examination of multi-age art education, this study largely depended on my own sensibilities as the primary instrument for analyzing and making sense of the information that I have collected (Eisner, 1998a). The findings of the study have been filtered through my own personal lens of interpretation as a researcher. Since I observed, analyzed, and interpreted the actions and perceptions of others, my ability to do so became both a guiding strength and potential limitation of the study (Eisner, 1998a). Overall, a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, approach to this research held a greater potential for responding to, describing, interpreting, and evaluating (T. Anderson, 2000b) the real-life subtleties of multi-age art instruction.

This research project used multiple types of collected data as one way to establish the credibility of my findings. The structural corroboration, or triangulation, of multiple instruments of data collection can be a crucial step in establishing the authenticity of findings obtained through qualitative fieldwork (Eisner, 1998a). In terms of this research project, the broad, contextual information initially obtained through the written surveys were checked with the findings obtained through qualitative observations and interviews with the selected multi-age art teacher. When I compared the data collected from the surveys, observations, and interviews, I was seeking a “confluence of evidence that breeds credibility” (Eisner, 1998a, p. 110). This gathering of supportive evidence allowed me to present stronger, more-authentic conclusions than I may have reached by using only one source of data. As I analyzed the data from the survey research and qualitative interviews, I assumed that the respondents were answering truthfully, accurately, and to the best of their abilities (Hutchinson, 2004).

As a qualitative study that used purposive, non-probability methods of data collection, this research project did not make formal inferences to a larger population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). That is to say that inferential statistics were not used to make formal generalizations to all elementary level multi-age art teachers, nor was it the purpose of this research project. However, that is not to say that the findings of the research project only apply to the multi-age art classrooms under investigation. Eisner (1998a) reminds researchers that generalizability is still possible in qualitative research through the natural transference of “what has been learned from one situation or task to another” (p. 198). In studies using inferential statistics, the researcher typically makes generalizations. In qualitative studies, naturalistic generalizations are more
likely to be made by interested teachers and practitioners who work in similar situations to ones under investigation (Eisner, 1998a; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). It can be assumed that the findings of this research project hold implications for multi-age education, art education, and for others working in similar circumstances. Those reading this report will play a role in judging whether the findings are applicable to their particular situations.

**Definition of Terms**

**Cooperative Learning:** A set of instructional techniques through which students are placed in small groups in order to support and increase one another’s learning while working toward a common goal. These groups are traditionally made up of students with mixed abilities who are not only held responsible for learning classroom material, but also for helping others in the group to learn as well (Wong & Wong, 1998).

**Developmentally Appropriate Instruction:** Instruction that meets the developmental or readiness needs of students, regardless of their chronological age. The developmental grouping of students in classrooms lasts for brief periods of time and occurs when “teachers pull together a small group whose members share a need for at least one session” (Kasten & Lolli, 1998, p. 286).

**Flexible Grouping:** The rearrangement of students from classroom group to classroom group in order to meet their changing developmental, readiness, and interest levels (Tomlinson, 2001).

**Integrated Instruction:** “Instruction that utilizes more than one disciplinary domain or strategy to facilitate learning – for example, using art, social studies, and history to understand themes of the American Civil War” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005, p. 236).

**Looping:** The practice of students remaining with the same instructor(s) for a prescribed period of years for the purpose of establishing a continuity of caring and instruction in a family-like atmosphere (Kasten & Lolli, 1998).

**Multi-age Learning Environment:** A purposeful grouping of students from two or more traditional grade levels in order to form a classroom community of learners (Kasten & Clarke, 1993).

**Nongradedness:** A specific set of educational principles aimed at reforming the organizational structure of schools, but also including research-based best practice suggestions in the areas of educational materials, curriculum, assessment, and instruction (Anderson & Pavan, 1993).
**Professional Autonomy:** The freedom among professionals to make their own job-related decisions without coercion or pressure from their “clients, from others who are not members of the profession, or from the employing organization” (Forsyth & Danisiewicz, 1985, p. 60).

**Scaffolding:** The process that takes place when a tutor or expert helps another individual who is less expert in problem solving activities in order to come to new co-constructed solutions or meanings for the tasks at hand. An older or more advanced partner may serve as a foundation for which younger or less experienced members can stand upon in order to reach new levels of knowledge that they may not have gained when acting alone (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

**Thematic Instruction:** The organization of lesson plans around central topics of interests or themes, instead of by separate subject area curricula. Subject areas themselves are not ignored however. Instead, meaningful interdisciplinary connections are used to integrate the study of writing, reading, math, science, history, and arts into the classroom theme (Shanahan, Robinson, & Schneider, 1995).

**Summary**

This research project examines the practice of multi-age art teaching and the meaning that this act holds for those who engage in nongraded art instruction. The guiding research question is: what qualities characterize art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts from the State of Florida, and what are the implications for structuring and implementing multi-age art education in other Florida schools? In this chapter I have introduced the current state of schooling and use of graded models of instruction in the United States, the multi-age reform movement, and the lack of existing literature that is available to art teachers in regard to nongraded art instruction. I have also introduced the purpose of the research project, the guiding and supporting research questions, as well as the limitations and assumptions of the study. In the next chapter, I will present an extensive review of related literature on the topics at hand.
CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature about multi-age models of schooling first became common during the time period between 1955 and 1975 and has since seen renewed interest beginning again in the 1990s (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). While neither time period has produced much literature or research on the topic of nongraded art instruction, the resulting body of written work can be used as a tool for understanding multi-age models of education at the elementary level and as a framework for forming research on multi-age art education. The written work chosen for this review of literature will focus on the following topics: (a) the use of pragmatism as a theoretical framework appropriate for this study, (b) learning theories and educational philosophies that are relevant to multi-age grouping practices, (c) social learning in art education, (d) the historical beginnings of the multi-age movement, (e) definitions and descriptions of multi-age classrooms and practices at the elementary level, (f) studies that investigate the effectiveness of multi-age groupings, (g) recommendations for implementing multi-age models of instruction, and (h) written work that has relevance and makes suggestions toward the application of multi-age education in the art classroom.

The review of literature was compiled by searching through a variety of written work and research sources. These sources include textbooks, resource books, research articles, dissertations, masters’ theses, web pages, and papers presented at conferences. These sources were often located through useful computer and manual searches into the catalogues of written work provided by libraries, the Internet, and digital databases. The digital databases that proved most useful in compiling this review of literature included the Educational Resources Information Center, Dissertation Abstracts International, WebLuis, and Psych Info. Many of the keywords that proved successful in obtaining salient literature included different combinations of the following terms: multi-age education, art education, nongraded classrooms, continuous progress, multi-grade education, and mentoring. Often, a manual search of the citations in one relevant source would reveal the existence of many other written works that became useful in compiling the literature review.
Theoretical Framework

Educational researchers should clearly state the theoretical underpinnings, concepts, philosophies, and propositions that orient and shape their approach to inquiry, research, and thinking (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). “Good researchers are aware of their theoretical base and use it to help collect and analyze data. Theory helps data cohere and enables research to go beyond an aimless, unsystematic piling up of accounts” (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003, p. 22). As such, researchers are not just interested in describing what they have observed, “but in explaining its meaning; this goal frequently requires putting what has been described in a context in which its antecedent factors can be identified” (Eisner, 1998a, p. 95). Theoretical frameworks, then, help to explain a researcher’s approach to inquiry as well as the findings of research itself (Eisner, 1998a).

The philosophies and ideas of pragmatism are relevant to the theoretical framework of this research project on two levels. In terms of content, the philosophies of pragmatism have strong connections to the educational theories that support and frame the ideals of multi-age education. In terms of methodology, pragmatism can also be used as way to frame and explain my approach to research and educational inquiry.

Pragmatism and Multi-age Education

The philosophies of pragmatism were initially formulated and introduced during the later part of the 19th century by philosophers from the United States such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey (Magee, 1998), and Oliver Wendell Holmes (Menand, 1997, 2001). Pragmatism rejected the traditional view of truth and knowledge that had typically been held by both scientists and philosophers for centuries. Unlike the scientists of that time, the pragmatists did not see truth as a fixed entity that was waiting somewhere out there in the universe to be discovered (James, 1907/1975). People were not seen as passive observers of the truth. Instead, people were seen as active participants who made meaning and truth through their actions and interactions.

Since people were active participants in acquiring knowledge, making meaning, and creating truth, it was ultimately their own experiences that helped them to arrive at these truths (Holmes, 1881/1963; Menand, 2001). Human experience was described as the interaction between people and their environment. People form belief systems, meaning, knowledge, values, and truth through their interactions with the world around them. From a pragmatic
viewpoint, experience and learning is social in nature. Since truths are formed through social interaction, then knowledge is formed collectively rather than individually in isolation.

However, the ideas and knowledge that were created through social interaction were not seen as eternally fixed or unchangeable truths. Ideas only remain true as long as they continue to be verified through experience (Peirce, 1877/1997). When people find that ideas no longer work for them in practical experiences, they can adapt, revise, or even discard these ideas in favor of new ideas that are more suitable. People, then, are active participants in constructing knowledge on several levels. First, they are involved in the social construction of knowledge through their interactions with others and their environment. But they are also active participants in verifying the truth of ideas (James, 1907/1975). Therefore, truth is not only socially constructed, but it is also flexible, adaptable, and capable of change.

Dewey (1938/1997) described people’s interaction, or transaction, with each other and their surrounding environment as a key component to learning. People were further described as social creatures who learned through their experiences. In their interactions with the environment, people were sure to encounter obstacles and roadblocks in their learning (Dewey, 1913). These obstacles would cause people to shift their perceptions and seek new solutions that would in turn lead to further growth in experience. People carried these experiences around with them and would rely upon these references in their continued educational development as contributors to society (Dewey, 1938/1997).

Pragmatism offered new viewpoints into the nature of truth and, in that process, changed the accessibility of philosophy to more practical affairs. By emphasizing social interaction in the process of meaning making and verification, pragmatism helped philosophy to become more applicable to every-day concerns (Menand, 2001). The theories of pragmatism can be practically applied to a number of disciplines including law, religion, politics, class, and even the organizational and operational structure of schools.

The pragmatic viewpoint that knowledge is socially constructed by people through their interactions with one another and their environment seems to counter the way in which schooling in the United States has been traditionally organized. Historically speaking, schools in the United States have traditionally presented instruction that expected students to do work on their own in individually isolated desks without much social interaction (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Furthermore, the current emphasis on standardized testing in U.S. schools as mandated by the No
Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) may have actually exacerbated the teaching practice of discouraging student-to-student social contact during learning situations. Standardized tests are typically administered to individual students who are physically arranged in isolated desks. Due to the high-stakes nature of most of these tests, teachers spend a great deal of their instructional time getting students ready for test-taking situations (Abrams & Madaus, 2003; Chapman, 2005). Thus the addition of mandated standardized testing to already entrenched methods of traditional schooling seems to leave students with few opportunities within their classrooms for socially constructed meaning making in a pragmatic sense.

In contrast to the traditional emphasis on individualistic learning in U.S. schools, the tenets of multi-age education expect social and collaborative interaction between students of mixed age groups instead of restricting such events from occurring (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Elkind, 1993; Miletta, 1996). Additionally, the multi-age philosophy calls for the use of experiential learning activities and hands-on assignments in order to allow students to make meaning through their interaction with the classroom environment (Cushman, 1993; Lolli, 1998). While multi-age classrooms are arranged to feature social and environmental interaction (Cushman, 1993), traditionally arranged classrooms with isolated rows of individual desks are often more suited for passive listening rather than active doing and experiential learning (Dewey, 1900/1990). Although some of the theoretical and practical connections between pragmatism and nongraded instruction have been detailed here, a more expansive description of the philosophies and characteristics of multi-age education will be offered later in this chapter.

Pragmatism and Educational Research

My methodological approach to this research project, as well as my intentions for the project in general, can also be framed and supported by the philosophies of pragmatism. That is to say that pragmatism serves as an appropriate theoretical framework for the nature of this study. Biesta and Burbules (2003) explored the implications of pragmatism for social research and stated that pragmatism offers “neither a specific ‘program’ for the conduct of educational research, nor any specific research methods. What it does offer, however, is a distinct perspective on educational research, a specific way to understand the possibilities . . . of research . . . for education” (p. 107). As such, my research project will not be following a prescribed lock-step method of data collection as outlined by pragmatism; there is no such
A pragmatic approach to educational research is one that seeks to provide practical resources and make practical suggestions, but not mandatory axioms, that may be used by teachers in their daily practice, planning, and decision making activities (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). This approach to educational inquiry does not paint a picture of researchers working away in sterile laboratories as they try to discover the truth “out there” to be handed out to teachers as unbreakable laws and principles of educational practice. Instead, educational research undertaken from a pragmatic standpoint is more likely to focus on the experiences and relevant problems presented to teachers as they interact with others and their environment on a day-to-day basis. Since such researchers are interested in addressing topics that are relevant to the real-life experiences of educators, then a crucial aspect of research is identifying a significant problem or situation worthy of inquiry (Dewey, 1938). The problem presented by my research study centers around the lack of literature and resources available to aid multi-age art teachers in their decision making and planning processes, as well as the characterization of the qualities of multi-age art education itself.

Identifying a problem and speculating on the subject, alone, does little to address the multitude of complex concerns that may present themselves in real-life classroom situations. In order to understand the meaning of identified educational problems or situations, researchers need to collect information through experience or by taking action (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). One way for researchers to experience classroom situations and determine what is truly happening is through observation. Observation helps the researcher to collect the facts of the case (Dewey, 1938) and, in that process, helps the researcher to formulate, strengthen, revise, or explore new ideas about the situation under investigation. In my research study, I will collect information on multi-age art education by directly observing an art teacher as he or she engages in nongraded instruction, by experiencing interviews and conversations with this art teacher, and through the collection of surveys from multi-age art teachers in the State of Florida.

Collecting numerous observations and vast amounts of information on nongraded art instruction will not be enough to offer practical suggestions to other multi-age art teachers. The end result would be an unorganized heap of data with no analysis to make any implications clear.
to real-life teaching situations. Experiences become meaningful and lead to knowledge when those who have experienced them reflect upon these events as interactions with others and their environment (Dewey, 1916). Researchers need to analyze and reflect upon their observations in order to form ideas and make meaningful suggestions to others in education (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Since my research involves multiple methods of data collection, I will have several different ways of collecting the facts of the case and also several different ways to formulate ideas about multi-age art instruction. In educational research grounded by the philosophies of pragmatism, “facts and ideas do not develop independently but . . . there is a constant ‘check’ between the two” (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 60).

Pragmatism, then, serves as an appropriate theoretical framework that supports the ways in which I have identified a problem to be studied and the ways in which I will collect and reflect upon data. Beyond that, pragmatism also serves as a philosophical model that explains the ways in which the findings of my research may be applied. Because pragmatism sees truths as being formed collectively through social interaction, Dewey (1916/1997) maintained that social continuity depends on establishing ways in which experiences can be shared with others as meaningful, direction-providing resources. When applying this concept to educational research, it becomes clear that writing about and analyzing the experiences of practicing teachers is not just a descriptive endeavor. By sharing the experiences of those in particular educational situations, researchers are actually adding to the resources that may be used by others in collective decision-making (T. Anderson, 2000a; Biesta & Burbules, 2003). If these resources are made available to teachers, then they can use such shared knowledge and experiences to intelligently guide their actions and help them in planning and problem solving situations. It is my intention in this research project to collect, analyze, and share the experiences of multi-age art teachers in Florida as a way to offer suggestions and aid such multi-age art teachers in their planning and decision-making processes.

It should be emphasized, however, that it is not the goal of pragmatically grounded educational research to hand down mandated, set-in-stone, directives that teachers must use in their classrooms (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Pragmatism does not call for the search of a universal truth that is waiting “out there” to be discovered and then dictated to others (James, 1907/1975). If researchers have been clear and open in describing the purposes, methodologies, and conclusions of their research, then educators should be able to determine for themselves the
applicability and practicality of research findings, suggestions, and implications to their own personal teaching situations.

**Learning Theories and Philosophies of Education**

Although the philosophers of pragmatism concentrated on socially constructed knowledge as early as the late 19th century, learning theorists and cognitive researchers have historically and primarily dealt with learning as if it occurred only within the individual mind of each individual student (Heid, 2004). Since learning was generally conceived of as an individual activity, schools in the United States have traditionally presented instruction that expected students to do work on their own without significant social interaction (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). In contrast, the philosophies of multi-age education support collaborative and social interaction between students of different age groups instead of prohibiting such collaboration from occurring (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Elkind, 1993; Miletta, 1996). Considering this, it is useful to explore some relevant learning theories and educational philosophies that broke from the tradition of an individualistic view of cognition and began to explore schooling and learning in social contexts.

**Learning and Schooling in Social Contexts**

When examining theories of cognition that are applicable in social situations, many scholars inaccurately believe that Piaget ignored the possibility of cognitive development through social interaction (Rogoff, 1990). In actuality, Piaget (1926/1959) speculated that cooperation between peers may aid individuals in their own cognitive development. When children work together on a common activity, they may encounter differing perspectives on the same task. In such cases, social interaction leads to cognitive conflict as different children may offer different answers or different solutions to the same problem. As young peers present their differing views to one another, individuals may realize that there are existing alternatives to their originally conceived ideas. As a result, many children will actually restructure their thoughts and come to new realizations. In this sense, the social interaction that initially caused the cognitive conflict can also lead to equilibrium, or the resolution of this conflict, and thus further cognitive development within individual children.

Piaget (1926/1959) emphasized the importance of this interaction occurring between children of similar developmental ranges rather than between a child and an adult. In the case of children’s interactions with adults, it was unlikely that true cognitive restructuring would result
within the child. Due to the inherent and asymmetrical nature of power and authority involved in most adult-to-child interactions, the child may simply accept the adult’s perspective to be true without actually restructuring their own thoughts. In this case, children simply abandon their own ideas in favor of the ideas of the adult without truly verifying and exploring such concepts on their own. Piaget, however, did consider that intelligent adult teachers might know how to effectively work down to the child’s level in order to construct adult-to-child interactions that actually do foster cognitive development.

Vygotsky (1934/1986) recommended teaching to students’ developmental range rather than to their specific mental age when he introduced his ideas on the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is the difference between a student’s mental age and the level that the student is capable of achieving in collaboration with an adult or with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). The range of the zone is determined by what the child is able to achieve with assistance. Teachers who present problems that can be solved individually by students working entirely on their own are failing to address the theory of the zone of proximal development. Instead activities and experiences are to be presented to students at developmentally appropriate levels somewhat higher than that of their independent abilities.

Wood et al. (1976) used the term, scaffolding, as a metaphor to describe the process that takes place when a tutor or expert helps another individual who is less expert in problem solving activities. This metaphor is easily translated to group problem solving situations and cooperative learning activities as well. As groups of students work together to solve a problem, the members of the group approach the task at different levels of understanding. In this process of problem solving, students cooperate with one another and adjust their points of view as they come to a new co-constructed solution or meaning for the task at hand. An older or more advanced partner within the group may serve as a foundation for which younger or less experienced members can stand upon in order to reach new levels of knowledge that they may not have gained when acting alone. Educators use such scaffolding techniques as a way to address Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (Bigge & Shermis, 1999). The idea of co-constructed knowledge presents one way in which Vygotsky’s concept of learning differs from Piaget’s in terms of social context (Rogoff, 1990). For Piaget, social interaction can serve as a catalyst for cognitive development within an individual. For Vygotsky, social interaction leads to co-constructed knowledge that is arrived at between learners.
Rogoff (1990) compared the process of cognitive development in children to an apprenticeship. Children play an active role in their own development by advancing their understanding and attainment of skills through participation in culturally organized activities with more experienced partners. The more advanced member of the partnership models, assists, and teaches skills to the partner with less experience in shared problem solving activities. The apprenticeship model of development allows for the inclusion of more than one expert and more than one novice in the process of co-constructing knowledge. Group activities then allow for a wide range of developmental levels as multiple peers challenge and assist one another in sociocultural learning. The apprenticeship model of cognitive development does not just account for the advancement of skills in the novices of the group; the experts are also seen as developing understanding and fine-tuning their skills as they guide others to new knowledge.

Gardner (1991) saw the apprenticeship not as an old-fashioned mode of servitude, but as a valuable strategy of instruction for the contemporary school. Apprenticeships served as one part of a proposed model of instruction that addressed the ways in which students can gain genuine understanding. Gardner (1991) envisioned a more effective method of schooling in which students entered into various apprenticeships throughout their pedagogical experiences. The apprenticeships could be led by an adult expert but would also contain a group of mixed-age students that ranged in their developmental levels and expertise. In the learning process provided by the apprenticeship, students could gain knowledge through direct experience, by interacting with more able peers, and by providing help to new or less experienced members of the group. Gardner (1991) stated that the best opportunity for education to lead students to authentic understanding could be found in a marriage between the concepts presented by apprenticeships, children’s museums, and some aspects of traditional schooling.

Rogoff (1990) recommended that modern Western society’s cultural emphasis on the individual should be balanced with recognition of the importance of the interdependence of children in cognitive development. The typical Euro-American school was given as a central example of a sociocultural context where individual and independent thinking is emphasized.

Dewey (1900/1990) applied his philosophies of pragmatism to education and, in that process, criticized traditional methods of schooling for its isolation from authentic social experience. Traditional methods of schooling counted on students to be passive in nature as they were expected to absorb the content of lessons through direct dictation, recitation, and
memorization from books and lectures. Lessons were presented to students as they sat in individually isolated desks that were used primarily for listening rather than for interacting with materials and other students. Dewey (1900/1990) stated that schools should become more connected to the motives of life, rather than separated from it as an isolated institution that presented isolated lessons. A more ideal model for organizing schools could be found within the examples provided by healthy homes and families. Within family structures, children actively learn through social discourse, participation in activities that lead to common goals, and would have opportunities for their misconceptions to be reorganized into continuous chances for gaining knowledge.

Dewey (1900/1990) further stated that one of the primary principles of schooling should be in training children in the mutually interdependent aspects of cooperative living. The assignment of group work through experiential activities presented to students can have a positive impact on the classroom environment. Interaction between students on a common task creates a community spirit among those involved in the group activity. The assignment of group work can lead to a cooperative classroom environment rather than the competitive atmosphere frequently present in classrooms where students work exclusively alone. In this sort of environment, helping one another is not seen as cheating or charity, but rather as an opportunity to further the power and impulse of those involved in experiential activities.

**Social Learning in Art Education**

Eisner (2002) maintained that the typical norms of acceptable behavior in many art classrooms are particularly suited for providing students with learning experiences in social contexts. In many traditional classroom settings, students are not allowed to discuss their ongoing assignments with each other and are certainly not allowed to look at each other’s papers, worksheets, or tests. Some classroom situations require students to ask permission from their instructors in order to even get up from their seats. Generally, students are also not allowed to talk to one another during the administration of standardized tests and looking at another student’s standardized bubble sheet is considered cheating. In the typical art room, however, students are expected and encouraged to look at each other’s artwork and discuss the art making process with one another. Many art teachers expect their students to move freely about the classroom in order to discuss work with peers or retrieve specific art materials when they are
needed. Eisner (2002) described this classroom atmosphere as an approximation of an artist’s studio and felt that such an environment fostered both a sense of community and cooperation.

Eisner (2002) described a conception of learning in the art classroom where students’ artwork is viewed in a social rather than an individual context. In this context, students learn more than just the techniques of handling various artistic media; “social norms, models for behavior, opportunities to converse and share one’s work with others are also opportunities to learn” (Eisner, 2002, p. 93).

Situating students’ artwork in a sociocultural context holds major implications for the instruction of visual arts. Eisner (2002) envisioned the impact of such a view and depicted the creation of art classrooms and art curricula where social learning could be emphasized. Group activities could be assigned within an art classroom that would require students to solve problems collectively rather than individually. As students used each other as resources to solve given problems they would learn not just the academic objectives of the art curriculum, but also about one another and their approaches to art. As a cooperative rather than isolated model of art instruction, such classrooms would provide more authentic life-like experiences and could therefore foster easier transfer of knowledge from the art classroom to the outside world. Such an art room would appear much different from traditional classrooms where individual students are expected to work alone.

Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) presented a holistic, authentic approach to teaching art that focused on thematic instruction with connections made to real life rather than creating art for its own sake. Art, both in and outside of the classroom, was seen as a way to communicate social and personal meanings, as well as the human experience itself. Thematic instruction was recommended as a method for connecting learning to real world issues and problems. Themes were to be introduced through the presentation of visual artwork that addresses real life concerns. Collaborative discussion and activities, as guided by the art teacher, were to be used as a way to have students grapple with the social issues presented within the artifacts. The art teacher’s role in guiding these discussions was to explore the heterogeneity within the art classroom so that multiple perspectives could be introduced and a consensus could be reached. The use of collaborative dialogue also necessitated that the art teacher provide and facilitate a safe and caring atmosphere where students felt comfortable sharing their experiences and perceptions. The art class was seen as a place or social context where students could cooperatively work
together to understand these real-life problems and reach deeper understanding of these issues through the discussion of and creation of artwork. Several sample lesson plans were provided for this authentic and collaborative approach to art education, many of which encouraged group art making activities such as the construction of murals, mandalas, exhibitions, and installations.

Efland (2002) proposed an integrated approach to cognition that could be used as a way to explain learning in the arts. The integrated cognitive theory was created as a harmonizing amalgamation of symbol-processing and sociocultural cognitive theories that often conflicted with one another. In this process, Efland described the implications that sociocultural views of cognition have for art education. Among these implications is the idea that the study of art is best understood in social contexts rather than in isolation. Furthermore, a sociocultural view of artistic development would not support the notion that children’s drawing skills automatically or naturally unfold at a predetermined universal rate. Instead, children learn image making through the observation of others as they make art and by interacting with and experiencing cultural examples in their environment (Wilson & Wilson, 1982). Efland’s integrated cognitive theory also included the idea that meaning-making and knowledge is not constructed individually in isolation. Rather, knowledge is constructed with the help of cultural tools as learners interact within a cultural environment.

Hurwitz (1993) described collaborative activities in art education in detail and defined such group orientated projects as ones in which two or more student artists interact in order to create an artifact or even an event that they could not, in some way or another, have created by themselves. While collaboration can be physically useful in completing large-scale works of art such as murals, the benefits can also be conceptual, social, and psychological. Students working on group art projects can experience a socializing value as they share ideas, learn from one another, make compromises, and reach consensus. The end product often requires student-to-student interactions that are unique, democratic, and quite unlike the results of individual projects that are guided by the set parameters of the teacher as an authority figure. A group approach to art projects can be less competitive in nature and can increase the freedom of students to take positive risks in decision-making. In the description of collaborative art education, Hurwitz traced his own interest in cooperative learning as it stemmed from the social events and avant-garde movement of the visual and performing arts during the 1960s and 1970s. While a how-to-do-it approach was avoided, many examples of collaborative art projects were
provided, including earthworks, community planning, murals, chalk-ins, installations, and multimedia events.

**Historical Background Relevant to Multi-age Education**

An early example of schooling that contains elements of multi-age education is the one-room schoolhouse of pre-industrial times in the United States (Kasten & Clarke, 1993). Students of various ages attended school together while being instructed by a single teacher in a single classroom, usually under a single roof. Due to an overall population explosion (Buffie, 1971) and mass immigration into the United States (Connell, 1987), it soon became clear that these small schoolhouses would no longer be sufficient to hold the increasingly large number of students who must attend them. By the mid-1800s, the one-room schoolhouse had already begun its slow dissolve into larger buildings with a different organizational structure. In consideration of the one-room schoolhouse, it could be argued that a multi-age model of instruction existed prior to graded structures of schooling (Kasten & Clarke, 1993). Any exploration of the current movement of multi-age education should then begin with an examination of why and how graded structures were organized in the first place.

**Origins of the Graded School**

As larger facilities were built to replace one-room schoolhouses, school administrators began the policy of grouping students into grade levels (Hallion, 1994). This decision had little to do with solid educational research, and more to do with the appearance of new influences in both the educational and industrial U.S. scene. These influences included the publication of graded textbooks, the observations and policies of Horace Mann, as well as the rise of the industrial age.

The first graded reading textbooks in the United States appeared in 1836 and proved to be a huge success (Buffie, 1971; Goodlad & Anderson, 1959/1987; Hallion, 1994). The *McGuffey Eclectic Readers* included lush illustrations and were presented in six sequential grade levels. In many cases, these textbooks became the curriculum guide for teachers. Likewise, parents began to associate their children’s success on whether or not they could handle the material presented within their assigned grade level book. The success of the *McGuffey Eclectic Readers* influenced the publication of graded textbooks in other subject areas and their perpetual use can still be seen in elementary schools to this day.
The most influential, if not the first, graded or common school in the United States opened during the 1840s in Boston, Massachusetts (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Buffie, 1971; Goodlad & Anderson, 1959/1987; Hallion, 1994; Hillson, 1965). The Quincy Grammar School and its graded system of organization were created under the leadership of then Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, Horace Mann. Mann’s inspiration for the Quincy Grammar School was the result of a trip to Germany during which he observed graded models of instruction in action. Mann’s observations convinced him that the German system could help U.S. schools to educate the growing number of immigrants arriving into the country. When creating the structure of his own version of the German graded school, Mann turned to models established by the flourishing industrial scene within the United States. The structure of the Quincy Grammar School and the other graded Massachusetts’ schools that followed were largely based on a factory assembly line model that had proved to be so effective in the realm of industry.

Of course, Massachusetts was not the only state feeling the growing pains of higher student enrollment. In reaction to the U.S. population explosion, school administrators throughout the country scrambled to find an easily managed and economical way to organize and monitor a transition to a mass system of public education (Goodlad & Anderson, 1959/1987). Inspiration for organizing these larger schools was found in the rise of the U.S. industrial age, rather than in existing learning theories (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Following Mann’s lead, school systems chose to mimic what had seemed so successful in the realm of business and manufacturing. Students became part of the educational factory system where “administrators ran and monitored the school assembly line for quality control, measured by grades, tests, and, in cases where uniform quality was defective, non promotion of pupils” (Kasten & Lolli, 1998, p. 7). Thus the graded elementary school model was established in reaction to the population explosion and inspired by the industrial age rather than learning theories. With the help of the ever-growing production of graded textbooks, 150 years have passed and the graded elementary school model remains largely unchanged. To be more direct, “much if not most of what happens in schools happens because that is the way it was done in earlier generations, not because we have a convincing rationale for maintaining it today” (Gardner, 1991, p. 202).
Early Efforts in Reorganizing Graded Schools

While the graded elementary school model still remains entrenched within the contemporary U.S. educational scheme, it should be recognized that several influential efforts to reorganize the traditional elementary school did occur during the early half of the 20th century (Hillson, 1965). Hillson (1965) noted the contributions offered by the ideas and actions of such progressive educators as John Dewey (1859-1952) and, in Europe, Maria Montessori (1870-1952) toward the efforts in school structural reform. Montessori’s concept of autoeducation sought to free pupils from the strict standards imposed on them by grade levels and, to that end, has served as one of the first and most enduring criticisms of graded education (Hillson, 1965). To this day, the influence of Montessori can be found in schools and school districts throughout the United States. Some public Montessori schools within the State of Florida characterize their programs as multi-age in terms of organizational structure (J. Allen Axson Public Montessori Academy, 2003; Montessori Program, 2002; R. V. Daniels Montessori School, 2005).

Dewey (1900/1990) called for a reform movement away from many established methods of traditional instruction in his ideas on progressive strands of education. The theories of progressivism discouraged the grouping of students by grade levels, but emphasized the use of cooperative activities and group discussions (Gardner, 1991). Progressive strands of education stressed the students’ development within a community while allowing them to progress at their own pace.

Dewey’s theories turned into educational practice when he opened the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago in 1896. Three years after the school opened, Dewey (1900/1990) described the organization of the Laboratory School by stating the following:

At the outset we mixed up the children of different ages and attainments as much as possible, believing there were mental advantages in the give-and-take thus secured, as well as the moral advantages in having the older assume certain responsibilities in the care of the younger. (pp. 174-175)

The Laboratory School’s strategies for mixing up the ages of their students changed slightly during the years of Dewey’s tenure. At times the students were grouped in a completely heterogeneous fashion, while at other moments the students were grouped by ability or even by interests. In all cases, though, the mixed-age grouping of students was organized to avoid “the rigid stepladder system of the ‘graded’ school. . . . [and] to keep a family spirit throughout the
school, and not the feeling of isolated classes and grades” (Dewey, 1900/1990, p. 175). The Laboratory School at the University of Chicago also featured the use of experiential learning activities as well as the movement of students from teacher to teacher in order to come in contact with a variety of instructional personalities. After Dewey left his position at the University of Chicago and joined the faculty at Columbia University in 1904, the progressive ideals and curriculum of the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago slowly disappeared as well (West, 1989).

Criticisms of the Philosophy of Graded Education

The advantages of grouping students by grade level seem to have remained more or less the same since the practice began in the 19th century. Graded models of schooling offer an economically sound organizational structure that is easily organized by administrators and easily monitored by teachers (Kiddle & Schem, 1965). Significant ideas and research developed in the 20th century, however, have shown flaws in the reasoning that established the foundations of the graded elementary school. Many current cognitive interactionist learning theories readily acknowledge that students are not like uniform machines (Bigge & Shermis, 1999). To them it would seem absurd to expect that each student could have the same new parts added to them during a certain school year, and then (assuming that the parts fit correctly) be shipped on down the assembly line. Mental age data now suggests that a typical first grade classroom can have up to a four-year gap in students’ readiness levels (W. Miller, 1996). In such a case, some students may not be ready for their predetermined part while others may have already acquired it. Furthermore, Eisner (1998b) maintains that the developmental gap between children of the same age actually widens over time. When examining reading achievement scores in heterogeneously arranged classrooms, the developmental range of results is found to be approximately the same as the students’ traditional grade level (Eisner, 1998b). To be more specific, the students of a first grade classroom may only have about a one-year gap in their range of scores in reading achievement. By fifth grade, however, this spread has grown to a five-year gap; by the ninth grade, the spread has widened to a nine-year gap, and so on. The ever-widening disparity between reading achievement scores over time further complicates the practicality of an assembly line approach to education by age level.

The traditional system of schooling has also fallen under criticism for not offering a very naturalistic picture of life and for being distinctly separated from all other forms of social
organization (Dewey, 1938/1997; Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Miletta, 1996). Outside of the elementary school, humans play, work, and socialize in multi-age groups. In contrast, students at the typical graded elementary school arrive in the morning and report to their classroom with their classmates of the same age and stay within this homogeneously grouped classroom for the majority of the day. With the exception of a few transitions, these students could go the length of the day without interacting with peers of different ages. This is the environment in which students find themselves placed day after day from kindergarten to fifth grade in traditionally organized elementary schools. Research on age segregation showed that the strict grouping of children by age groups is rare in society, except in summer camps or schools where such segregation may be beneficial to the adults who organize such bureaucratic institutions (Ellis, Rogoff, & Cromer, 1981). Kasten and Clarke (1993) implied that there is no other place in life, except the elementary school, where children are so strictly segregated by age and limited to contact only with those of the same age group.

Additionally, the graded school’s policy of retaining students has also proven to be outdated. Dewey (1916/1997) foresaw the fallacy of promotion and retention policies and theorized that such practices actually failed in getting students prepared for the future. Today Dewey’s ideas on retention seem more relevant than ever. Scholars who have compiled, summarized, and synthesized existing research on grade level retention have found that retained students have greater failure rates and lower self esteem, while the retention itself has had no impact on student achievement levels (Shepard & Smith, 1990; Wiles & Bondi, 2000). Despite these findings, the graded system of schooling has remained entrenched in U.S. educational practice more out of tradition, rather than research. Overall, there has been no significant research that supports the effectiveness of grouping students in self-contained, graded classrooms (R. H. Anderson, 1987).

**Multi-age Education**

The multi-age movement began as the fallacies of the graded system became more and more evident to some educators. Multi-age programs and literature on the subject became prominent between 1955 and 1975 and has since seen a major revival beginning in the 1990s (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). Many sources cite the publication of Goodlad and Anderson’s book, *The Nongraded Elementary School* (1959/1987), as a seminal and inspirational moment in the
organization of this public school reform movement (Ball, 2002; Gaustad, 1993; Glogau & Fessel, 1967; Hallion, 1994; Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Miletta, 1996). This influential book was updated and reissued in 1987, just prior to the second wave of interest in models of multi-age education. At different times, multi-age classrooms have been labeled as nongraded, family grouped, ungraded, vertically grouped, individually guided, mixed-age, or continuous progress programs of education (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). While different terminology has been used at different times and places, the philosophy of such programs has remained more or less the same and the term, multi-age, serves well as an all-embracing descriptor.

Multi-age Models Described

During this time period, multi-age models of instruction have been described in slightly different ways from classroom to classroom or school to school (Kasten & Clarke, 1993). This is partially due to the high levels of choice offered to the instructors facilitating these mixed-age learning environments. In order to account for these differences, multi-age environments at the elementary level are loosely defined as the purposive grouping of students from two or more traditional grade levels in order to form a community of learners (Kasten & Clarke, 1993). This grouping should not take place merely for reasons of building a sufficient class size. The material presented to these classes should not consist of distinctly separate curricula. That is, a classroom of first and second graders who still receive entirely separate instructions by grade level would not fit the multi-age criteria. Two separate grade level groups in the same room do not necessarily mean that a true multi-age class exists. Teaching strategies, materials, and curricula are to be used at developmentally appropriate levels instead. Students within a multi-age class still move from easier to more difficult concepts as guided by their instructor, but this movement occurs at a pace that is not determined only by their age or grade level.

While teachers of multi-age classrooms do indeed target their lessons at developmentally appropriate levels rather than at one level suggested for a particular age group, this practice only represents one way in which multi-age teachers take advantage of the heterogeneity presented within their learning environments. Seeing multi-age instruction as only using developmentally appropriate lessons may mislead some to think that the philosophy relies strictly on ability grouping. In actuality, Kasten and Lolli (1998) state that ability grouping is not an appropriate strategy to use when making up an entire class list of multi-age students prior to the beginning of
the school year. Just as multi-age teachers should attempt to create a class list that represents heterogeneity in age, so should they also attempt to create a class list that represents heterogeneity in ability. It is the diverse nature of multi-age environments that allow the instructors to flexibly group and regroup their students within their classrooms in order to meet the students’ individual needs. At times the multi-age teacher may create smaller groups within the classroom that are formed by achievement or developmental level; at other times the children may be placed in cooperative learning groups of mixed ability (Gaustad, 1993; Hallion, 1994). In still other instances, students may work in pairs, individually, or in interest groups that may be disbanded after the completion of specific tasks.

Elkind (1993) characterized the flexible grouping of students that occurs within multi-age classrooms as encouraging mixed-age cooperation rather than competition. Older or more developmentally advanced students are encouraged to work cooperatively with younger or less experienced students. Hunter (1992) recommended that teachers of multi-age groups use informal, formal, and on-going authentic assessments along with their own observations to determine a student’s appropriate developmental level and thus, their placement within cooperative learning groups. Differentiated instruction is given at various levels in order to address the range of abilities and interests within a multi-age classroom.

Kasten and Clarke (1993) noted that it is not just the younger or less experienced members of a multi-age class that benefit from the use of cooperative grouping and cross-age mentoring. The more experienced or more advanced members of the group must be able to consciously express their thoughts and knowledge in order to transfer it to others in their group. This act requires a complex selection of language that would be well suited for student-to-student explanations. In this process, the helping students also experience a crystallization of their own knowledge as well as an increase in self-esteem.

Bozzone (1996) recommended that students stay within the same multi-age class and with the same multi-age teacher(s) for a prescribed period of years. The practice of students remaining with the same teacher for a set number of years is often known as *looping* (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). The number of years that a particular student should loop with his or her multi-age teacher(s) can be determined in a practical manner. If a multi-age classroom consisted of the traditional grade levels of kindergarten, first, and second grades, then an incoming kindergarten
student should remain with the same multi-age teacher(s) for a three-year cycle until he or she would traditionally be ready for third grade (Bozzone, 1996). A team of multi-age teachers who remained with their students for a period of years reported spending less time on the introduction of classroom management procedures at the beginning of each school year (McCarthey et al., 1996). As new students entered the multi-age group, the older more experienced students helped the new arrivals to settle in to the environment and learn the routines established by the teachers and the classroom culture. The team of multi-age teachers also reported the benefits of setting long-term goals with individual students and the joy of seeing results over longer periods of time. The extended involvement of the multi-age teachers helped them to understand and meet the emotional and academic needs of their students while forming deeper relationships in that process. The multi-age teachers established a continuity of caring as they built rapport with both returning students and parents from year to year. Noddings (1996) recommended that students and teachers should stay together for a period of years in order to build caring relationships and to establish caring classroom environments. Relationships take time to develop, yet the end results can be very fulfilling for both students and teachers.

Creating a community feeling within multi-age classrooms goes beyond the continuity of caring that is established as teachers remain with their mixed-age group of students for a period of years. Kasten and Lolli (1998) recommended that multi-age classes should be given a community name and reminded multi-age teachers that such naming deserves careful consideration. If teachers truly want to create a non-segregated group of collaborative learners, they should banish all use of grade level distinctions and terminology when addressing their students and throughout their school. Except in cases where multi-age teachers may have to refer to grade level distinctions in written paperwork required by state and district mandates, students should be regarded as individuals and learners rather than as first graders, second graders, and so on.

Giving a multi-age class a team or family name may further aid in blurring the traditional distinctions caused by grade levels and may offer one more opportunity to build a community atmosphere. This point is particularly driven home by certain multi-age teachers who refer to their learning environments as families (Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Kasten & Lolli, 1998), neighborhoods (Heins, Tichenor, Coggins, & Hutchinson, 2000), homes, or houses (Denham
Oaks Elementary School, 2005; Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Telfer, 1971). The implication is that multi-age teachers see their classrooms/homes as caring places where students of different ages, races, and preferences can gather together in a community context. While students can take part in this naming process in order to establish further ownership of their new title, teachers should wisely guide them in this process or create an appropriate name themselves. Examples of multi-age classroom names include *Discovery Cove*, *New Horizons*, *Primary Pioneers*, and *Trailblazers* (Centennial Elementary, 2000). In any case, the overall concept is that classrooms become more than a one year pit stop in the continuum of education. Instead multi-age teachers are able to build lasting relationships with students and even parents while grounding this relationship in a place, context, or home.

**Instruction in Multi-age Classrooms**

Heins et al. (2000) noted that merely putting a mixed-age group of students together in the same classroom does not necessarily result in better education for these students. Ultimately it is the delivery of instruction and the implementation of teaching strategies that best support the philosophical foundations of multi-age education that impact students’ learning. Lolli (1998) described a multi-age curriculum as being constructivist in nature. Students are allowed and expected to make meaning from experiential learning activities as well as the modeling that is presented to them by teachers and other students throughout the school day. Learning then is conceived as more than just the memorization and regurgitation of facts that have been presented to students directly through lectures and textbooks. Teachers still present subject area instruction, but they take into consideration the student’s needs, the content of material, and the learner’s schema in the planning of their lessons.

Lolli (1998) further described the content of multi-age instruction as being integrated into broad based conceptual or thematic inquiry units. Thus the content of instruction often centers on a central concept or theme of interest to the students within a multi-age classroom. As the multi-age class is immersed within a broad based conceptual or thematic unit, opportunities are provided for the students to make connections to real life and explore their own interests within this theme.

The focus of multi-age instruction goes far beyond the traditional emphasis on reading, writing, and arithmetic. Instead the curriculum is seen as interdisciplinary and should address major subject areas including science, language arts, mathematics, the social sciences, and the
fine arts (Miletta, 1996). In the case of thematic instruction, appropriate links between subject areas and themes can be found in order to integrate the concept across the curriculum (Lolli, 1998). The multi-age model of instruction advocates both the use of curriculum integration and interdisciplinary connections.

Cushman (1993) described multi-age classrooms as environments that are physically arranged to feature teams of students working together, rather than individually isolated in desks of columns or rows. This purposeful grouping of students further aided the teacher in his or her ability to use cooperative learning strategies and to facilitate cross-age tutoring. Many of the activities assigned to these groups included hands-on projects that helped students learn through their experiences rather than just through dittos and worksheets. Frequently, these hands-on activities featured the use of various learning centers placed throughout the classroom.

Anderson and Pavan (1993) discussed the appropriateness of a team teaching approach to organizing and instructing multi-age classrooms. This particular model of multi-age instruction may feature two or more teachers who work with a large family of mixed-age students. This scenario often includes several classroom spaces that connect, contain moveable walls, or form a pod. In this model, the presence of additional teachers and additional class space may aid in providing more opportunities for the flexible grouping of pupils by developmental levels and by subject area. Cushman (1993) described such a team taught multi-age class in which students were moved from instructor to instructor or classroom to classroom in order to meet their changing developmental needs. Although more than one classroom and more than one teacher were used in this instance, the entire family of learners could still meet periodically for whole group instruction or family time. In this example of multi-age instruction, as in others, a continuity of caring was established on several levels. Students, teachers, and parents alike benefited from the relationships that were formed as students remained and progressed with the same group of peers and teachers for a period of years.

The team teaching approach to multi-age education offers several other benefits to the teachers as well as the students. When preparing for thematic instruction, a group effort can aid the multi-age teachers in the efficiency of their planning by dividing the content of the theme into smaller responsibilities for each individual teacher (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). Not only will this lessen the planning load for each teacher, but it can also result in a more in-depth presentation of multiple aspects of the topic to the students. Team teaching can also be seen as a
valuable way to combat the isolation that many teachers experience when working alone. In instances where a team taught model of multi-age education is implemented, the teachers have found it beneficial if they are allowed to form their own teams and that each team of teachers is provided with a common planning time (McCarthey et al., 1996). In the process of planning and delivering instruction as a team, multi-age teachers found that they were constantly modeling the same type of cooperation and communication that they expected from their students (McCarthey et al., 1996; Miletta, 1996).

**Multi-age Teachers**

Grant and Johnson (1996) speculated that the philosophies and teaching strategies advocated by multi-age education might not be suitable for all teachers. However, teachers who are suited for multi-age instruction may share some common characteristics and philosophical orientations toward education (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Multi-age teachers tend to be child-centered in terms of making curricular decisions that are best suited for each student’s changing developmental levels, rather than trying to force outside goals or interests onto the child when these goals may not yet be developmentally appropriate. Multi-age teachers typically believe that different children have different strengths in learning styles or types of intelligences, and therefore it is the teachers’ responsibility to provide their students with an array of educational media and learning experiences in order to address all of the students’ needs. Strict learning, memorization, and quizzing from graded textbooks and worksheets will not address all the learning styles and different developmental levels within any classroom. Multi-age teachers tend to be lifelong learners who are interested in trying new strategies, attending educational workshops and conferences, and learning through conversations with other teachers as well as their own students.

Chase and Doan (1994) described their own educational beliefs and views as practicing multi-age educators who collaborate as team teachers. These nongraded instructors saw their class as a community of learners in which students of different ages, and even the teachers themselves, are given opportunities to learn from their experiences with one another. Like any effective community, the multi-age classroom is made up of individuals with different strengths and different preferences for learning. The multi-age teachers honor these differences by taking a child-centered approach that begins with the individual and developmental needs of the child rather than with an inflexible and universally prescribed curriculum. The multi-age teachers also
expressed their belief in getting to know their students as people and individuals over time. By looping with their students for a three-year period, the multi-age teachers are able to guide the long-term, individual progress of students. Similarly, the students are given an opportunity to know their teachers while being provided with the comfort of a consistent classroom environment, consistent expectations, and an opportunity for everyone to learn and lead.

Anderson and Pavan (1993) created an inventory of educational beliefs and ideas as a type of questionnaire that teachers, teams of teacher, or entire faculties could complete as a way to check the compatibility of their own educational philosophies with those advocated by multi-age education. Among other beliefs, the inventory reveals that nongraded instructors tend to see collaborative learning environments, rather than competitive ones, as ideal situations for fostering student motivation, progress, and achievement. While students may benefit from being arranged in homogeneously-arranged ability groups on occasion, students and people often learn best from interacting with those who are on slightly different developmental levels than themselves. Flexible grouping can provide opportunities for both mixed-ability peer mentoring and instruction geared to specific developmental levels regardless of age.

The inventory of educational ideas also indicates that multi-age teachers tend to believe that different children learn in different ways and at different rates (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). Teachers need to honor student differences in learning styles and in culture by offering a variety of activities that address these differences and provide all children with a chance to succeed. Mastering of skills and concepts is still important, but learning is conceived as a continuous process that occurs at varying rates. Learning is not viewed as segmental with prescribed and predetermined norms established and imposed upon specific ages as a way to determine success or failure. As such, standardized tests and grade-level checklists are more appropriate to measure conformity rather than the diversity that actually exists and should be celebrated within classrooms and society. Alternative, authentic, ongoing, and informal assessments and student portfolios should be developed and used to qualitatively evaluate the individual, continuous progress of each student.

The inventory of educational beliefs and ideas created by Anderson and Pavan (1993) was constructed in such a way that it also reveals those philosophies that are not congruent with the ideals of multi-age education. Educators who may not be suited for nongraded instruction may believe that efficiency in teaching is represented by covering the prescribed, standardized,
and sequenced curriculum as quickly as possible. To them, good teachers are those who have addressed all of the set subject area standards within a given school year, regardless of whether or not all of the students were able to keep up with the pace. At the end of the school year, only the students who have kept pace and mastered the prescribed grade level goals should be allowed to progress to the next level of schooling. Competition between individual students may be a motivating factor in the race to meet grade-level expectations. Those who have not kept pace must repeat the sequence of standards again. The main goal of education, then, should be in reaching uniform achievement standards. It is important for teachers to document the students’ attainment of such standards, and the best way to do so is through the use of strong programs of evaluation that utilize clear-cut and uniform instruments of quantitative assessment. Ultimately, a teacher’s ability to have his or her students reach such standards reflects on both the worth of individual teachers and schools. Teachers who are more suited for traditional graded education are likely to reject and resists proposals to try new methods of instruction, unless they are certain that the new methods will guarantee the results and uniformity that they are seeking.

Overall, the descriptions offered by Kasten and Lolli (1998), Chase and Doan (1994), and Anderson and Pavan (1993) show multi-age teachers to be philosophical endorsers of child-centered approaches to education, cooperative grouping, differentiated instruction, and developmentally appropriate practice. Multi-age teachers appear to expect a variety of different learning styles, rates, and cultures within their classrooms and assume that it is the teachers’ responsibility to provide instruction that best meets the needs of student diversity. Beyond these philosophical descriptions, multi-age teachers have also been recognized as professionals who are willing to break away from the traditional paradigms of grouping and evaluating students in U.S. schools. As such, multi-age teachers have been generally described as creative, energetic, dedicated, and open-minded, and have also been characterized as leaders, risk-takers, and those who enjoy collaborating with others (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996; Kasten & Lolli, 1998).

Research Studies

While descriptions of multi-age classrooms are useful in understanding the characteristics of the model itself, these descriptions do little to examine the effectiveness of such programs of instruction. Many scholars have investigated nongraded schooling and related areas of interest in
order to offer insight into the advantages and disadvantages of implementing and creating multi-age classrooms.

Compiled Studies on Multi-age Education

Many studies have been conducted to offer further insight into the effectiveness of multi-age programs. B. Miller (1990) reviewed 21 existing studies that compared multi-grade classrooms with traditional graded classrooms. The research included data on both students’ academic achievement as well as their attitude toward themselves and school. The results showed that the multi-grade grouping of students did not have a negative effect on student achievement. In the case of attitude, students were found to have both a better attitude toward school and a better self-concept in over 75 percent of the studies that were reviewed. The study concluded that multi-grade models of elementary instruction offer an equally effective and viable alternative to the traditional graded system of school organization.

Pratt (1993) surveyed the results of 30 experimental studies on multi-age classrooms conducted between 1948 and 1983 in Canada and the United States. This compilation also addressed research on both students’ academic achievement and attitudes within a multi-age environment. The results showed that the multi-age grouping of students did not have a consistent effect on academic achievement. In the case of attitude, students were once again found to have both better self-esteem and a better outlook toward school. The study found that the disadvantages of the graded model of instruction included the stimulation of competition and rivalry, isolation, and difficulty for students whose developmental level deviated from normal expectations. The study concluded that multi-age classrooms require inventiveness, creativity, energy, and time on the part of teachers, but that such environments are psychologically and socially healthy places.

Anderson and Pavan (1993) analyzed and compiled the results of 64 published research studies conducted on nongraded classrooms between the years of 1968 and 1990. The analysis revealed that these studies most frequently favored students in nongraded classrooms over students in traditional age-segregated classrooms in both the areas of mental health and academic achievement. Additionally, students of low socioeconomic status, African Americans, boys, and underachievers were particularly found to perform better academically and have a better attitude toward school and themselves in nongraded classrooms. It was concluded that available research
shows generally favorable results for students in nongraded, multi-age classrooms and that research evidence exists to support the theoretical foundations of nongradedness.

Overall, the compiled collections of educational research on multi-age groupings offered by Anderson and Pavan (1993), Pratt (1993), and B. Miller (1990) contain many references to studies that utilize the comparison of standardized achievement test scores during data collection procedures. While the results of these test scores generally support the use of multi-age grouping as a viable alternative to traditional grade level organization, Kasten and Lolli (1998) imply that such test scores are more of an interesting and useful result of nongraded grouping rather than the actual reason for forming multi-age classes. After all, the use of individually-given, standardized tests that are often norm-referenced by grade level might not seem to have the best fit with the philosophies of multi-age education. As such, Kasten and Lolli imply that the most useful aspect of achievement test results in relationship to multi-age grouping is one of encouragement to potential multi-age educators. Such test results may encourage a teacher or administrator who is genuinely interested in multi-age grouping, but is reluctant to take on such an endeavor for fear that his or her students or school may perform poorly on high-stakes tests as a result. On the other hand, teachers who enter into multi-age education with the main purpose of seeking higher individual student test scores may find that their teaching methods, as guided by their motivation, do not match well with the philosophies of multi-age education.

**Individual Studies with Negative Findings**

While compiled findings on student performance in multi-age classrooms are generally favorable, that is not to say that all research on nongraded instruction has been so positive. Within the compiled reviews of research, individual studies can be found that favored student performance in traditionally arranged classrooms over student performance in multi-age configurations. Carbone (1961) examined the differences between 122 students in multi-age classrooms and 122 students in traditional graded environments. As part of this research, students took a basic skills test and participated in a mental health analysis. The basic skills test not only measured total achievement but also provided results in the individual areas of math, reading, vocabulary, work-study skills, and language. In every single skill area, including total achievement, the students in traditional graded environments scored significantly higher than students in multi-age classrooms. In the case of the mental health analysis, there was no significant difference between the graded and non-graded students in four out of the five factors.
that were selected for examination. The fifth factor of the mental health analysis, social participation, produced results that significantly favored the students in traditional graded classrooms.

Out of all of the subject areas, skills, and mental health factors examined by Carbone (1961), only the results of a semantic differential exam favored the students from multi-age classrooms. The purpose of the exam was to record students’ use of descriptors in relationship to their teachers. The results showed that multi-age students were more likely to describe their teachers with such words as sweet, good, relaxing, bright, quiet, and interesting. In contrast, the students in traditional graded classrooms were more likely to describe their teachers with such words as hard, boring, dull, rough, sour, loud, and bad. Noting the results of the semantic differential exam as the lone exception in the study, Carbone (1961) concluded that the use of multi-age grouping does not in itself result in better academic achievement or mental health for the students who are placed in such groups.

Brooks (1973) compared the science achievement scores of students in multi-age classrooms with the science achievement scores of students in traditional graded classrooms. The sample size of the study involved 181 graded students and 122 nongraded students. Both sets of students were administered the Stanford Achievement Test in Science during data collection procedures. In this instance, the results of the study showed that the graded students scored significantly higher when compared to the multi-age students.

Bell et al. (1976) selected a group of 57 beginners in a nongraded school in Canada and followed their progress throughout three consecutive years of their primary schooling. During that time span, achievement data from the nongraded students was periodically compared to that of 112 students from a school with traditionally grouped, graded classrooms. Both groups of students came from the same middle-class suburb and were well-matched based on socio-economic level and cognitive skill level prior to the beginning of the study. Data collection procedures included the periodic administration of achievement tests in the areas of reading and mathematics, as well as the administration of one personality test that was given during the last year of the study. In addition to the administration of these tests, both the multi-age program and traditional graded program were observed throughout the course of the research.

The most conclusive results of the Canadian study (Bell et al., 1976) were largely based on the students’ achievement test scores. At different points during the three-year investigation,
the graded students scored significantly higher on either the reading portions or mathematical computation portions of the achievement tests. At no time during the three-year period did the multi-age students score significantly higher than the graded students on any part of the achievement tests. This led Bell et al. to conclude that students in graded classrooms are able to achieve better progress in basic skills than students in nongraded programs. This conclusion was partially explained by the observations of the researchers who noted that many of the students in the multi-age classrooms spent “much of their time in aimless wandering about, in watching movements of other classes, and interacting without useful purpose with their own classmates” (p. 241). The researchers also noted, however, that both the students in the graded programs and in the multi-age programs were found to be performing at or above the standardized norms set by the achievement tests for the time of year that the tests were administered. On the other hand, the results of the personality test were primarily inconclusive, except to say that both groups of students scored within normal ranges and that further investigation and instrumentation would be needed in order make any clear assumptions as to the effect of classroom organization on student personality.

While the individual study by Bell et al. (1976), as well as those by Brooks (1973) and Carbone (1961) found results that generally favored graded groups of students over multi-age students, it should be repeated that those who have summarized numerous reports on multi-age education have come to different conclusions. Overall, multi-age education has been found to be a viable alternative to graded structures of schooling by B. Miller’s (1990) review of 21 studies on the subject, by Pratt’s (1993) synthesis of 30 studies, and by Anderson and Pavan’s (1993) analysis of 64 published research studies on nongraded classrooms. In fact, the negative findings of Carbone and Brooks, as well as those by Bell et al. were all included in Anderson and Pavan’s compiled investigation. It was this analysis that concluded that studies on multi-age education most frequently favor students in nongraded classrooms over students in traditional age-segregated classrooms in both the areas of mental health and academic achievement (Anderson & Pavan 1993).

**Studies Investigating Dominance, Bullying, and Cooperation**

Even with the information provided by research studies on achievement, mental health, and attitude among multi-age groups of students, some teachers and parents may still have additional concerns about creating nongraded models of instruction or placing their children in
such classrooms. A chief concern among some may be that the presence of older, larger children mixed in with younger, smaller children will lead to bullying, dominance or aggression (McClellan, 1994). The theories of Bronfenbrenner (1970) as formulated during cross-cultural studies of childhood imply that an opposite dynamic is more likely to occur. Experimental research, observations, interviews, and additional scientific data were used to compare child rearing in the United States with that of child rearing in the Soviet Union. Bronfenbrenner theorized that the increased practice of age-segregation in the United States would continue to lead to increased levels of violence and antagonism among younger generations. When children primarily only interact with peers of the same age group, there is less chance for them to learn the patterns of responsibility and cooperation as expected by their larger cultural environment.

McClellan (1991) investigated the social behavior of preschool children in same-age classrooms in comparison to preschool children in mixed-age classrooms. Data was collected from 18 instructors who grouped their students strictly by age level and also from 17 instructors who grouped their students heterogeneously in mixed-age groups. These teachers were given the task of rating their students according to descriptive phrases that related to such categories as leadership, friendship/acceptance, and aggression/competition. The findings of the study revealed significantly higher levels of aggressive and competitive behavior among the students that were grouped in same-age classrooms. While the multi-age preschool classes did not have higher rates of leadership, the same-age classrooms were found to have a greater disparity between those students who were considered “social stars” and those who were ignored or rejected by their same-age peers.

French, Waas, Stright, and Baker (1986) examined leadership behaviors within mixed-age groups of students participating in cooperative problem solving activities. Students were placed in multi-age groups of the same sex that either consisted of second graders combined with fourth graders or fourth graders combined with sixth graders. The students were shown a series of eight illustrations and were asked to help the researchers in selecting the pictures that were most suited for display in a children’s hospital. Each child was first asked to independently record his or her own ranking of the pictures that were most appropriate for display. Afterwards, the students were placed in small mixed-age groups that consisted of one older student and two younger students. These multi-age triads were formed in order to come to a consensus, group decision that would generate a single list that re-ranked the illustrations. The students were
videotaped during this group decision-making process. Once the mixed-age group had completed their task, they were once again separated in order to take an individually given leadership survey that consisted of four questions about participation in the group activity. The researchers used the results of the survey to assign an individual leadership score to each student in the groups.

In the case of the multi-age groups consisting of second graders and fourth graders, French et al. (1986) found that the older students in the group received higher leadership scores than the younger students. This finding, however, was not necessarily the case in the mixed-age groups consisting of fourth graders and sixth graders. The survey results did not clearly or consistently designate the sixth graders as the leaders in these groups. In both cases, however, it was concluded that the older members of the groups did not dominate or bully the younger members of the group in order to reach a specific outcome. Instead the older students tended to help organize the group, attempted to extract opinions from others, and even refrained from over-emphasizing their own opinions. This conclusion was reached through an analysis of the videotaped group discussions and was supported by the leadership surveys.

Stright and French (1988) replicated the leadership study of mixed-age groups (French et al., 1986) with some minor adjustments. Most significantly, the new study controlled for student familiarity with one another, as this factor could have played a role in how groups interacted and who assumed leadership roles within the group. Secondly, the groups in the newer study consisted of two older students combined with two younger students, rather than one older student combined with two younger students. The findings of Stright and French were mostly consistent with the findings from the earlier study. As before, the older students in the mixed-age groups consisting of second graders and fourth graders were more likely to be labeled as leaders. In contrast to the earlier study, however, the older students in the second group of mixed-age children were also more likely to be designated as leaders. Once again, an analysis of the videotaped group discussions showed that the student leaders did not coerce their group members to come to a consensus through bullying, overpowering, or domination. Instead the older students in the group served as organizers and facilitators of the group discussions. The older students in the group were more likely to solicit opinions from others in the group, were more likely to record the opinions of others, and were more likely to utter statements that helped organize the procedures of the group.
Implementing Multi-age Models of Instruction

Considering the overall favorable findings of compiled studies on multi-age classrooms (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; B. Miller, 1990; Pratt, 1993), it is only natural to wonder why the first wave of nongraded reform seemed to fizzle out in the late 1970s and 1980s before gaining momentum again in the 1990s. The lack of staying-power for the nongraded programs of past decades may hold implications for those who wish to implement multi-age programs in current contexts. Anderson and Pavan (1993) speculated that the decline in interest toward multi-age education during the 1970s and 1980s could be attributed to several factors. Politically speaking, the educational atmosphere of the late 1970s and the 1980s was described as unsupportive toward staff development and qualitative improvements in the structure of schools themselves. Funding was diverted away from teacher preparation and in-service programs, while an emphasis was placed on a “back to basics” approach tied to crude measures of accountability. It was also speculated that many enthusiastic or career-minded school administrators might have mandated multi-age structures on their staff without providing their teachers with proper training, materials, and on-going support. As these forward-thinking administrators quickly moved on to other jobs, their multi-age programs usually fizzled behind them as the commitment diminished in their absence. During this time period, support for the continuation of traditional graded structures of schooling came from the textbook industry, bureaucrats, and the makers of standardized tests, rather than from educational researchers and philosophers.

Difficulties in Implementation

Looking beyond the obstacles of past decades, difficulties are still presented by the implementation of multi-age models of instruction even in contemporary contexts. Cushman (1993) observed that multi-age models of instruction are perceived to be a poor fit with accountability measures that are tied to the administration of standardized tests at specific grade levels. Additionally, materials can be scarce for multi-age instructors in school districts where an emphasis is placed on the adoption of textbooks organized by grade level. In both instances, time may well rectify these disadvantages as research shows that multi-age students perform as well on standardized testing as their peers who are grouped strictly by grade level. Thus the problem of standardized testing is more of a perceived disadvantage than an actual one. In the case of the textbook industry, Cushman believed that the whole-language movement was slowly
influencing publishers to adapt their policy of creating strictly subject-delineated and age-delineated resource books.

Grant and Johnson (1996) noted another impediment to the formation of multi-age classrooms. Due to the extra time, energy, and creativity required of multi-age teachers, it was determined that nongraded instruction was not for everyone. In conversations with practicing educators, it was found that some teachers were reluctant to change their entrenched practices and still others were unwilling to try a new reform effort after experiencing poor results with previous efforts in other areas. Many veteran teachers near retirement openly admitted that they did not have the interest or energy to overhaul the organizational structure of their graded classroom at a late point in their career. It was determined that these teachers should not be forced into multi-age classrooms, as their outlook could unconsciously undermine the effectiveness of nongraded instruction. Multi-age teachers, however, should seek the good will of their colleagues who teach in traditional graded structures (Grant & Johnson, 1996).

Ball (2002) stated that the biggest disadvantage to implementing multi-age education is that the movement embodies and represents change, itself, in the eyes of the public at large. Erasing the walls that divide education into grade levels seems very different from the ways that parents learned in schools and that teachers have taught for generations. The idea that elementary schools are divided into grades has just become accepted as the way that schools are (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In general, reform efforts that challenge the public’s conception of “real school” tend to be rejected. On the other hand, reform efforts that call for add-ons to the traditional school structure, such as adding special education classes or kindergarten classes, tend to be accepted or at least assimilated.

Recommendations for Implementation

In reaction to the perceived disadvantages of implementing multi-age education and in consideration of the brief lifespan of nongraded schools in earlier decades, Kasten and Lolli (1998) created a list of recommendations that could be used in designing multi-age schools or classrooms. These recommendations were actually expansions on the ideas of Otto (1969) who originally studied the needs of nongraded programs in Texas during the 1960s. The first recommendation was that the strict mandating of multi-age classrooms should be prohibited (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). If a school administrator forces the multi-age model upon their staff and upon their students, an unsupportive backlash would surely erupt amongst some teachers and
parents, dooming the structure before it ever began. Instead, the creation of multi-age classrooms should be presented as a choice, option, or alternative to both teachers and parents so that they can decide for themselves if such structures are appropriate for their children. If a new multi-age charter or magnet school is created, then teachers will have the choice as to whether or not to apply for a position and parents will have the choice as to whether or not to enroll their children in such a school. In other instances, interested teachers may create multi-age classrooms within existing schools as an add-on option. The end result would be a school that offers both graded and multi-age structures. Parents would have a choice as to which program to place their children.

Another recommendation made by Kasten and Lolli (1998) was that the implementation of multi-age instruction must have the commitment of the classroom teachers who are involved in the formation of such nongraded structures. Teachers were seen as leaders and as having the largest potential impact on the effectiveness of multi-age implementation. Since individual instructors were given the choice whether or not to teach in multi-age environments then, in theory, those instructors have already bought into the foundations of the multi-age philosophy and should be willing to put in the time and energy required of such a new endeavor. The administrator’s responsibility was described as providing multi-age teachers with additional time and resources for pursuing their commitment. Teachers may need additional time for planning and perhaps even substitute or professional days in order to organize their multi-age classes by attending staff development sessions, multi-age conferences, or school retreats.

Along similar lines, it was also recommended that appropriate materials for multi-age instruction should be provided for those teachers who have committed to guiding multi-age classes (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Teachers will need access to materials for hands-on and experiential activities, copies of thematically related trade books, and access to multiple libraries, as well as educational software and technology. Some multi-age classrooms may also need larger group tables to replace the individual desks found in most traditional classrooms (Hallion, 1994). Only a few copies of graded textbooks would be allowed and they would only be used as reference books since grade level distinctions are not to be made within multi-age classrooms. Kasten and Lolli (1998) finally recommended that instructors, parents, and administrators should all be included in some combination or another in the formation of consensus leadership teams that make joint decisions about the educational goals of multi-age classrooms.
In consideration of the difficulties and adjustments that teachers may experience when contemplating a change to nongraded structures, trainers of multi-age education (District School Board of Pasco County, 1993) have suggested that there are ways for interested, yet apprehensive, teachers to ease their way into such changes. These trainers suggested that there is a multi-age grouping continuum that allows teachers to experiment with the underlying concepts of multi-age education as they work toward the ideal goals of complete nongradedness (see Figure 1). For example, a single teacher who is contemplating, but still unsure, about a change to a multi-age model of organization could begin by utilizing scaffolding techniques through peer tutors and buddies within his or her traditional graded classroom. Teachers that are already comfortable with this technique may consider looping with their students as they stay together as a class for a period of years. The next step may be for a teacher to combine two grade levels within his or her classroom, yet still tend to make some distinctions between grade levels and curricula during instruction and groupings. The final step in the continuum for a single teacher would be to move to completely nongraded multi-age structures with no distinctions between grade levels.

Suggestions have also been made in terms of the same sort of continuum for teams of teachers who are contemplating a change toward multi-age classrooms (District School Board of Pasco County, 1993). The continuum in this case begins with the decision of a group of teachers to form a team that plans and works together with each teacher still maintaining his or her own individual classroom, each on the same grade level (see Figure 1). If team teachers are comfortable with this strategy, they may reorganize their team vertically so that each teacher on the team is in charge of a different grade level in a consecutive order. Students in such situations will stay with the same team for a period of years, but will still move from one traditional grade level to the next within that team. The next step in the continuum for such vertically arranged teams is to blur the lines between grade levels somewhat and allow the very highest or lowest students in each ability group to cross grade levels when such moves would best address their appropriate developmental needs. The last step in the team-taught multi-age continuum is to erase grade levels completely within a multi-age house and provide students with opportunities to work in heterogeneously arranged mixed-ability groups as well as in developmental groups.
Although the organizational structure of multi-age education may seem very different from that of “real school” to some, Hunter (1992) implied that teaching in a multi-age classroom is not all that different from effective instruction in any classroom. Many of the principles of multi-age education have been considered good principles of effective instruction when applied to any classroom, regardless of whether or not the students are placed in mixed age groups (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). However, when these principles are used in a classroom where the artificial boundaries of grade level distinctions and expectations have been erased, students are then allowed to progress at their own pace and reach their maximum potential within a caring, supportive, and collaborative environment (Lolli, 1998).
Art Education and Multi-age Models of Schooling

Recently, the National Art Education Association published a book entitled Community Connections: Intergenerational Links in Art Education (La Porte, 2004). This book compiled descriptions and research studies on the topic of intergenerational art programs and community art projects that crossed generational lines. Intergenerational programs typically focus on the cooperative efforts of younger generations and the elderly as they work together toward a common task in an exchange of ideas and experience. Such intergenerational art programs have been found to have positive social, psychological, and educational benefits to participants, both young and old.

While such programs usually do concentrate on bridging the gap between seniors and youth, Greenberg (2004) claims that students of various grade levels can also make intergenerational links when they work together within the same elementary school. Of the 11 chapters or case studies in Community Connections (La Porte, 2004), only the preface by Greenberg describes an intergenerational art program that focuses entirely on elementary students working with one another across grade levels. The preface relates the author’s experiences in instructing an early morning, before-school art program consisting of students ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade. Greenberg summarizes the positive impact for those working and learning within this elementary level, intergenerational group in the following statement:

By seeing what we can each do in the arts, by hearing others sing or dance, play an instrument, sculpt or paint, we realize that the arts belong to no age group, and that the same material can be manipulated and changed, whether in sound or shape or size, by whoever dares to try. (p. vii)

In all likelihood, the intergenerational art program described by Greenberg (2004) is not entirely the same as the multi-age models of education described within the salient literature on the subject (Chase & Doan, 1994; Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Miletta, 1996). It appears as if the students in Greenberg’s early morning, intergenerational art sessions spent the remainder of their school day in age-segregated classrooms. It is also possible that grade level labels and distinctions may still have been used within the early morning art class. While this intergenerational art program may not be considered multi-age in every aspect, the experiences of Greenberg may still hold implications for multi-age art educators. Art students working
across grade levels within the same elementary school may experience similar psychological, educational, and social benefits as the young and elderly typically working together in other intergenerational art programs.

Implications for multi-age art education in the United States may also be found in the infant-toddler day care centers and city pre-schools of Reggio Emilia in northeastern Italy. These schools offer a unique example of schooling that both emphasizes the arts and incorporates principles similar to those advocated by multi-age education. The Reggio Emilia schools do not group their students strictly by chronological age and instead allow the students to work together in groups with a difference in age level ranging from three to five years (Heid, 2004). Loris Malaguzzi and a dedicated group of young teachers who shared common pedagogical goals and philosophies established the Reggio schools in the aftermath of World War II (Gardner, 1999/2000; Hinckle, 1991). As a group, their aim was to establish and implement a progressive approach to preschool education for the children of families that had seen their countryside turned into a battleground. Gardner (1999/2000) detailed the Reggio approach to schooling as one that utilizes committed and dedicated teachers, the exploration of themes of interest, scaffolding techniques, a caring and family-centered atmosphere, and collaborative group work that results in co-constructed knowledge.

Danko-McGhee and Slutsky (2003) described the arts as receiving a place of emphasis within the Reggio curriculum. The arts are often used as a vehicle for exploring new areas of interest and representing newly acquired knowledge. Reggio Emilia schools also hire *atelieristas*, who are experts in both studio art and early childhood education, to guide students as they create both collaborative and individually paced art projects that address the emerging themes of interests. The Reggio staff works tirelessly to document and display the work of their students throughout the schools so that other students and the outside community can interact and learn from them as well. Scholars, early childhood educators, and journalists have all recognized the preschools of Reggio Emilia as being among the best in the world (Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2003; Gardner, 1999/2000; Heid, 2004; Hinckle, 1991).

Due to its emphasis on the arts, Reggio Emilia schools have received much attention from art educators in the United States and many articles have been published on this topic in recent years (Danko-McGhee & Slutsky, 2003; Pitri, 2004; Tarr, 2001, 2003; Wexler, 2004). In terms of the use of mixed-age family groupings, thematic instruction based on interest,
interdisciplinary connections, and cooperative activities, multi-age classrooms in the United States seem to have much in common with the Reggio Emilia preschools of Italy.

**Suggestions for the Multi-age Art Classroom**

Although many research studies have been conducted on multi-age education in general, little research has examined multi-age instruction in the art classroom. Existing literature does, however, offer some suggestions on the subject. For the most part, these suggestions come from principals, elementary educators, and professors of education. The voices of art educators are rarely heard on the subject.

Smith (1968, 1970) described the formation of multi-age classrooms at Brunswick Elementary School and South Frederick Elementary School in Maryland and offered suggestions to principals who planned to implement such nongraded programs. Art class was described as a vital part of the multi-age curriculum and recommendations were made for nongraded classrooms to attend art in multi-age groups on a weekly basis. No teaching strategies or suggestions for classroom organization were put forth for art teachers themselves.

Miletta (1996) discussed the importance of including curricular goals that addressed the development of aesthetic awareness within the students of a multi-age class. Descriptions were given of the success a multi-age classroom experienced during the instruction of thematic units on the topics of art history and multi-cultural art. Specific details were also provided that shared the success that a multi-age group of students had when participating in in-depth studies on famous artists such as Pablo Picasso and Diego Velazquez. All of the offered descriptions referred to the incorporation of art within the multi-age homeroom and not of instruction within the art classroom itself.

Camera (1996) described the successful integration and use of art projects within a multi-age homeroom class. Observations included the willingness of younger students to experiment and try new art techniques by observing the practice of older peers within the multi-age class. Recommendations were given for homeroom teachers to assist their students in advancing through the stages of artistic development. Several art projects were suggested as ideal examples for incorporation into the generalists’ multi-age curriculum. The report was geared towards the multi-age homeroom teacher and not specifically to art educators.

Kasten and Clarke (1993) proposed that the implementation of multi-age models of instruction would surely affect the practices of art, music, physical education, special education,
and other support staff that worked at these specific school sites. Recommendations were given to principals for discussing appropriate experiential comparisons that may be made with special area teachers who were nervous about making instructional adaptations when preparing for multi-age groups in their classrooms. Suggestions were offered to include all special area teachers and support staff in multi-age trainings and workshops. When appropriate, it was recommended that art, music, and physical education instructors could be used to integrate the themes and content areas studied within multi-age homerooms into their own curricula.

Kasten and Lolli (1998) theorized that multi-age education at the elementary level would be incomplete without considering the important role that special area teachers may play in the multi-age environment. Their areas of expertise were seen as crucial components to addressing the needs of the whole child within the multi-age classroom. Recommendations were made to include art, music, and physical education teachers in the planning of multi-age curricula and even the organization of entire multi-age schools. Including special area teachers as members of multi-age teams would not only integrate their particular subject area requirements into the curriculum, but would also contribute to the level of acceptance and ownership among art, music, and physical education teachers working at a nongraded school site.

**Studies in Art Education**

Kelehear and Heid (2002) proposed that the use of multi-age groups could be socially and artistically beneficial for students. This conclusion was reached after a three-week study during which 25 high school art students worked cooperatively with 18 first graders in the creation of a tile mosaic mural. Observations, written responses, and verbal sharing detailed the social, academic, moral, and artistic benefits to the students who participated in the completion of the mural. The social interaction involved in creating the group project was reported to accelerate risk-taking and experimentation in the art-making process and to have bi-directional benefits for students on both ends of the multi-age spectrum.

While the study by Kelehear and Heid (2002) implied that the same benefits might be found within a multi-age model of elementary art instruction, it did not describe such a scenario itself. The mural project represented the mentoring of elementary school students by high school students for a three-week experience under a brief but specific set of circumstances. These circumstances are not the same as a mixed-age group of elementary art students who have been purposively grouped together for the entire school year.
Heid (2004) suggested that opportunities exist for accelerated learning in a multi-age elementary art classroom when aesthetic experiences are provided within that context. This conclusion was reached through a nine-week teacher research study in which eleven third graders were combined with eleven kindergarteners for eleven sessions of mixed-age art class. Each third grade student was assigned a kindergarten buddy in order to work on collaborative art projects as assigned by the teacher researcher. Of the eleven pairs of students, the interactions of three pairs were purposively selected for closer analysis. Reflective journaling, photography, video taped lessons, transcribed conversations, and the students’ art projects were all used during data collection. Findings from the case studies revealed that two of the three mixed-age pairs were working and learning well beyond the grade level standards established by state mandates in art education.

While the findings of Heid (2004) suggested that accelerated learning can take place in a multi-age art classroom, it did not examine a natural multi-age class as is defined in most salient literature on the subject. The study examined the mentoring and collaboration of third graders working with kindergarten students during a brief and specific set of circumstances. Due to the limitations presented by the school’s daily schedule and traditional graded structure, the students examined within the study only met as a multi-age group in the art classroom and only did so for eleven sessions of art lessons that took place during a nine week schooling period. In between the eleven mixed-age art sessions, the teacher researcher was able to meet separately with the third grade students on seven different occasions in order to prepare them for upcoming mixed-age lessons, to practice active listening, and to discuss how to care for others. In a natural multi-age setting, such additional meetings would be frowned upon, even if they did fit within the art teacher’s busy schedule, as such a practice would constitute a clear distinction between grade levels that is to be avoided within multi-age practices (Kasten & Lolli, 1998).

Further grade level distinctions were evident in the study as the kindergarteners and third graders attended homeroom classes separately in traditional graded structures throughout the rest of the school day. At the conclusion of the research project, the teacher researcher regrettably reported that the limitations of the school schedule required the students of the study to return to their normal routine of attending art or other special area classes along with their classmates of the same age and grade. As such, the class examined by Heid (2004) represents a multi-age art class in a descriptive sense, but not in the language of specific educational terminology that is
typically found in multi-age literature (Chase & Doan, 1994; Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Miletta, 1996).

Serig (1995) conducted a naturalistic teacher research study as a master’s thesis on the subject of multi-age art education when two multi-age classes were formed at the elementary school where he taught art in Missouri. One of the multi-age classes added to the art schedule consisted of students traditionally labeled as first, second, and third graders. The other multi-age class consisted of a combination of students traditionally designated as second and third graders. The initial purpose of the research project was to develop and implement a visual arts curriculum that would be appropriate for each nongraded class. As a way to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the multi-age art curricula, the researcher recorded observations of the students as they participated in art class and conversed with one another about their work. Additionally, a select number of students in both classes were interviewed in regard to their opinions toward the new art curricula. Further methods of program evaluation were used in the form of student attitudinal surveys, sociograms of student movement and interaction, and reflective journaling by the teacher researcher. The study did not include observations or examinations of any multi-age groupings that included students at the kindergarten level nor any students above the traditional third grade level. Such groupings did not exist at the school under investigation. The study also did not investigate any team-taught multi-age classes, as this variation on nongraded instruction was not present at the examination site.

In the reflective conclusions of the study, Serig (1995) determined that the research project was more successful in outlining an appropriate approach to multi-age art education rather than establishing a set curriculum or package of lesson plans. The suggested approach for instructing multi-age art classes included the use of projects, activities, and discussions based on open-ended concepts and themes rather than specific skills or artists. The open-ended, conceptual approach allowed the students to explore the themes presented to the class at their own developmental and readiness levels. The selected themes presented to the art classes directly connected to the standards of the school district’s art curriculum and, when the connections were appropriate, frequently tied into the themes addressed by the multi-age homeroom teachers. The art teacher still introduced artistic techniques and skills to the multi-age students, but typically wove such instruction into the framework of thematic exploration and often did so based on indicators of group and individual readiness levels. Such an approach
demands that an art teacher becomes familiar with his or her students’ levels of artistic development and also gets to know the students as people and fellow artists. Art historical examples were also introduced and woven into thematic instruction, but these examples were not provided as the only or correct solution to the projects at hand. Students were often given a choice in art materials to explore the classroom theme, and students were also given choices to work alone or in groups. Many opportunities were provided for students to share, discuss, and analyze their artwork at the conclusion of thematic investigations.

Serig (1995) concluded that the use of multi-age groupings in art classrooms is not a cure-all. Behavior problems will still occur and multi-age art teachers may encounter some frustration and extra work in setting up a variety of materials or in brainstorming thematic approaches to art projects. Overall, however, Serig concluded the following:

The multiage classes . . . displayed general attitudes not as frequently displayed in graded classes. Students in multiage classes helped each other reach their goals. They explored ideas together, teaming up to utilize individual talents. They relied on each other for help in getting materials and struggling with problems instead of running to me as a first reaction. They began to understand the value of discussing art and the value of practicing skills to enhance abilities. They understood the connections. These students were positive risk-takers. Their teachers worked hard at creating a sense of community, and it spilled over beautifully in the art room. (p. 141)

Serig also concluded that many of the positive aspects of multi-age art instruction could work very well in traditional graded art classrooms as well. Integrated thematic instruction, cooperative learning groups, developmentally appropriate instruction, and open-ended assignments can work well in many classroom scenarios and Serig planned to implement these and other strategies in all of his classes. It was speculated, however, that the largest educational rewards may occur when these approaches are utilized in multi-age environments where artificially imposed boundaries have been blurred and artists are allowed to progress at their own rate of development within a collaborative and supportive art room environment.

Summary

The review of literature discussed the applicability of the philosophies of pragmatism as a theoretical framework that helped explain and support the ideals and goals of multi-age
education and also the methodological approach of this researcher. The pragmatic conception of knowledge and meaning-making as a socially constructed activity (Holmes, 1881/1963; James, 1907/1975; Menand, 2001) fits well with the cross-age, cooperative grouping strategies used by multi-age teachers. My approach to investigating multi-age art education also relates to pragmatism and educational research by the ways in which I have identified a real-life problem to be explored and the ways in which I plan to collect data from the actual experiences of multi-age art teachers (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). My approach to educational research is also pragmatic in terms of its intentions. The findings of this research project may be used to provide practical resources and practical suggestions, but not mandatory rules, that may be used by multi-age art teachers in their daily practice, planning, and decision making activities.

In addition to pragmatism, the review of literature also included a summary of other relevant learning theories and educational philosophies that deal with learning in social contexts. The theories and ideas that were reviewed included the role of social interaction in cognitive development (Piaget, 1926/1959), the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1934/1986), scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976), apprenticeships in learning (Gardner, 1991; Rogoff, 1990), and Dewey’s (1900/1990) ideals of progressive strands of education. Social learning and interaction in art education was also discussed in terms of the ideas of those who advocate its use as well as the implications that such learning theories hold for the field itself (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Efland, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Hurwitz, 1993).

The literature review also traced the historical background surrounding the creation of both multi-age and traditional graded structures of organizing schools and classrooms. While the one-room school houses of pre-industrialized times in the United States contained elements of the multi-age philosophy (Kasten & Clarke, 1993), these structures proved too small to accommodate the great rise in population that began in the mid 19th century (Buffie, 1971). The graded elementary school model was then established in reaction to the population explosion and inspired by the industrial revolution rather than learning theories (Kasten & Lolli, 1998).

The advantages of graded models of schooling have remained more or less the same since its inception. For the adults running such institutions, graded schools offer an economically sound organizational structure that is easily monitored by teachers and easily organized by administrators (Kiddle & Schem, 1965). In the 20th century, however, noticeable flaws have been recognized in the philosophies that support graded structures of schooling. Theories and
research now exist that suggest that students of the same age can vary greatly in their developmental and readiness levels (Bigge & Shermis, 1999; Eisner, 1998b; W. Miller, 1996). Students of the same age may not be developmentally ready for the same educational “parts” to be added to their cognitive “motors” in an assembly line fashion. Graded structures of schooling are also criticized for offering a picture of life that is separated from most other forms of social organization (Dewey, 1938/1997; Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Miletta, 1996). Outside of school, the segregation of people into groups of exactly the same age is rare (Ellis et al., 1981). Human beings naturally interact and socialize with a variety of different age groups in their everyday experiences at work and at play. Furthermore, compiled research studies on grade level retention have found that retained students have greater failure rates and lower self esteem, while the retention itself has had no impact on student achievement levels (Shepard & Smith, 1990; Wiles & Bondi, 2000). In spite of these criticisms, over 150 years have passed since the creation of graded instruction in the United States and little has changed in the way that most schools group children.

The literature review revealed that the multi-age movement began in earnest and received recognition around the same time as the publication of Goodlad and Anderson’s book, *The Nongraded Elementary School* (1959/1987). Due to the number of options allowed to multi-age educators, multi-age environments at the elementary level are loosely defined as the purposive grouping of students from two or more traditional grade levels in order to form a community of learners (Kasten & Clarke, 1993). Multi-age classrooms allow for the flexible grouping of students by developmental or interests levels and encourage the use of mixed-age cooperation rather than individual competition. Multi-age teachers are expected to loop or stay with their students for a prescribed period of years (Bozzone, 1996) and no distinctions are to be made in grade levels when addressing the students throughout the school (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). The literature review revealed that multi-age instruction is constructivist in nature and features experiential learning as well as thematic instruction that are applied across the curriculum in an interdisciplinary fashion (Lolli, 1998). The use of a team teaching option in instructing multi-age groups of students offers further advantages in flexible grouping, planning, and the constant modeling of cooperative interaction (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; McCarthey et al., 1996; Miletta, 1996). Multi-age teachers, themselves, were described as those who philosophically endorse child-centered approaches to education, cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and
developmentally appropriate practice (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Chase & Doan, 1994; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Multi-age teachers tend to value differences in students’ learning styles and believe that it is the teachers’ responsibility to provide materials and instruction that will meet the needs of all the students.

The effectiveness of multi-age instruction was also addressed within the literature review. Individual studies that favored graded structures of schooling in some aspects were introduced (Bell et al., 1976; Brooks, 1973; Carbone 1961). However, those who have compiled, summarized, and synthesized numerous studies on multi-age classrooms have found results that generally favored nongraded instruction (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; B. Miller, 1990; Pratt, 1993). Overall, multi-age students tend to score the same or slightly better, in terms of academic achievement, than students in traditional graded classrooms. Overwhelmingly, students in multi-age classrooms seem to have better self-esteem and attitude toward school than students in graded structures.

The literature review revealed that the disadvantages to implementing multi-age education include that multi-age instruction is not for everyone due to the extra time, energy, and creativity it may require of teachers (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). The creation of multi-age classrooms may experience resistance from both teachers and parents who are unwilling to accept change from structures that they perceive to represent “real school.” Recommendations presented within the literature review state that multi-age education can not be mandated, classroom teachers must be committed, appropriate materials must be provided, and consensus leadership should include teachers, parents, and administrators.

While extensive descriptions and studies have been offered and conducted on multi-age classrooms, a review of related literature showed that little research could be found pertaining to nongraded instruction in the art classroom. Other than the implications of intergenerational links in art education (Greenberg, 2004; La Porte, 2004) and the early childhood schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy, most written work on the subject of multi-age art education consists of simple suggestions made by principals, elementary educators, and professors of education. The voices of art educators have rarely been heard from in concern to delivering art instruction to nongraded groups of elementary children. Research on the subject of multi-age art education is needed in order to complement previous studies on nongraded instruction by exploring this model of elementary school organization through the relatively ignored lens of art educators.
The literature review also showed that some of the existing studies that do address multi-age education in the art room (Heid, 2004; Kelehear & Heid, 2002) have not always examined the scenario under natural conditions. The findings of these studies may indeed hold true, but the conclusions were reached through brief, temporary groupings of mixed-age students who were put together under special circumstances. These circumstances are not the same, qualitatively, as those described and defined by salient literature on multi-age education. One study that has examined a multi-age art classroom formed under natural conditions (Serig, 1995) was unable to report on a wide variety of multi-age combinations and options due to the limitations of the research site. Team-taught models of art instruction were not examined within the study, nor were mixed-age groupings of children that included kindergartners or students above the traditional third grade level. New research on multi-age art education is needed to add to previous efforts by qualitatively examining a greater range of multi-age variations under naturalistic circumstances.

In conclusion, the literature review revealed that additional research is needed in the area of multi-age art education at the elementary level. Art teachers working in multi-age environments could benefit from new research that would aid them in their planning and decision-making processes. Future studies in this area could be used by administrators and other school personnel to organize multi-age classrooms in a way that is mutually advantageous to the multi-age homeroom instructors and to the special area teachers who service their nongraded students. In this sense, future studies into multi-age art education could even offer some insight or implications to music, physical education, and other special area teachers who also find themselves giving specialized instruction to multi-age groups of students. In any case, the multi-age movement has survived in the U.S. public school system for decades. Its continued presence and the lack of resources for art teachers makes inquiry into the nature of multi-age art education both justifiable and worthwhile. The methodology that I used to investigate this topic will be addressed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to see what qualities characterize visual art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts from the State of Florida. Based on these findings, suggestions are made for structuring and implementing multi-age art education at the elementary level in Florida schools.

The review of related literature on multi-age art education presented in the previous chapter was a useful tool for developing research questions appropriate for the purposes of this study. Several themes became apparent within the literature review that were particularly useful in framing supporting questions for this research. Considering the numerous descriptions of multi-age models of instruction offered within various texts (Bozzone, 1996; Elkind, 1993; Gaustad, 1993; Hallion, 1994; Hunter, 1992; Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Kasten & Lolli, 1998; McCarthey et al., 1996), I couldn’t help but wonder how multi-age education in the art classroom could be described or characterized. The literature review also revealed a number of difficulties (Ball, 2002; Cushman, 1993; Grant & Johnson, 1996) and recommendations (Kasten & Lolli, 1998) for the implementation of multi-age models of instruction within schools. With that in mind, I wondered just how multi-age art education is structured and organized at the elementary level within the State of Florida and what advantages and disadvantages this may present for art teachers.

The review of literature also offered descriptions of multi-age teachers in terms of both their general characteristics and their overall philosophical beliefs toward education (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Chase & Doan, 1994; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). It was revealed that nongraded instruction, then, is not for all teachers (Grant & Johnson, 1996). As such, recommendations were made that multi-age education should not be mandated or forced upon those who are not suited or inclined to try this method of elementary school organization (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Considering this, I couldn’t help but wonder just who the practicing multi-age art teachers in the State of Florida really are? Are they teachers who share the same educational philosophies as those advocated by multi-age education? If not, what are their philosophical orientations toward art education and do their beliefs support or conflict with the principles of multi-age education?
The literature review also revealed that there are some schools with multi-age programs that may not have been originally conceived to be nongraded institutions from their inception. In some instances, interested teachers who have parental and administrative support may create multi-age classrooms within existing schools as an add-on option (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). The end result would be a school that offers both graded and multi-age structures. Art teachers already working at such schools may not have anticipated the creation of and arrival of multi-age groupings of students within their work environment. Have these art teachers been given a choice as to whether or not they will accept mixed-age groups in their art rooms? In general, are multi-age art teachers routinely asked about their willingness to participate in nongraded instruction during the implementation of such programs?

In consideration of the possibilities extracted from the review of literature, I framed research questions and, in particular, supporting questions that were broad enough to allow for the themes described above as well as other emergent themes to arise within the scope of the study.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question providing focus for this study is: *What qualities characterize art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts from the State of Florida, and what are the implications for structuring and implementing multi-age art education in other Florida schools?*

To answer and augment the primary question, several supporting questions have been developed:

1. How are multi-age models of art education organized and structured at the elementary level?
2. Who are the selected multi-age art teachers and what is the nature of their experience as art educators who teach elementary school students that are organized in nongraded groups?
3. What advantages and disadvantages are there for selected art educators engaging in multi-age instruction?
4. How do the purposes of the art educators and the classroom teachers engaged in multi-age education support or conflict with each other?
Research Procedures Framed as Objectives for the Study

The procedures of the study framed as objectives were to:

1. Critically review the existing, related literature on multi-age art education in order to create a foundation or framework for the study.
2. Critically review the existing literature on research methods in order to formulate a workable research strategy for the study.
3. Develop and implement the research by using survey, observation, and interview strategies and instruments.
4. Examine, analyze, and interpret the findings as applied to the purposes and guiding questions presented by the study.
5. Draw implications for those who plan multi-age models of education and also for art educators who are teaching in or may consider teaching in multi-age learning environments at the elementary level.

Brief Overview of the Study Design

I answer my research questions and examine the qualities that characterize multi-age art education by using the data collection instruments and techniques of written surveys, observations, interviews, and analysis. First, I located as many multi-age art teachers working in public elementary schools in the State of Florida as I could find. This procedure required me to contact those multi-age educators that I was already aware of, and then ask these same teachers to help provide information that would lead to other multi-age art educators. Such a process is known as snowball sampling (Babbie, 2004). Next I sent out a survey to all of the multi-age art educators that were identified through the snowball sampling procedures as a way to collect broad contextual information on their background, practices, and perceptions as nongraded art instructors. Having established the broader foundations of multi-age art instruction in Florida’s public elementary schools through survey research, I next sought to corroborate and augment these findings by studying the situation in depth. This procedure began as I selected a multi-age art teacher and observed his or her nongraded teaching practices. I also conducted several interview sessions with the selected multi-age art teacher. Given the nature of my research questions, the best approach to this type of inquiry was through qualitative research methods.
Theoretical Framework and Foundation of the Method

The methodology chosen for this research study is qualitative in design. The theoretical foundation of this research is grounded within a pragmatic framework by the ways in which I have identified a problem to be investigated, have approached my inquiries into multi-age art education, and the ways in which the findings of the research may be applied (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

Pragmatism as a Framework for Educational Research

Educational research undertaken from a pragmatic standpoint tends to focus on the experiences of teachers as they interact with their environment and with others on a day-to-day basis (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Considering this emphasis on the real-life experiences and problems presented to educators, a crucial aspect of educational research becomes the identification of a significant situation worthy of inquiry (Dewey, 1938). The problem presented by my research study focuses on the lack of resources and literature available to inform and aid multi-age art instructors in their planning and decision making processes. To begin to rectify this problem, I have focused on the characterization of the qualities of multi-age art education itself.

A pragmatic approach to educational inquiry also calls for researchers to actively collect information through experiencing situations firsthand (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Merely speculating on an identified problem does little to address the complexities that present themselves in classroom situations. Action needs to be taken. One way for researchers to experience what is truly happening in classroom situations is through the act of observation. Observation helps the researcher to collect the facts of the case (Dewey, 1938). These facts will then be used to aid the researcher in creating, revising, or supporting new ideas about the situation under investigation. These ideas are formed through the analysis of and reflection on collected observations. Experiences become meaningful and lead to knowledge when those who have experienced them reflect upon these events as interactions and transaction with others and their environment (Dewey, 1916). During the course of my research study, I have gathered and analyzed data on the subject of multi-age art education through the direct experiences of observation and interviews.
Pragmatism also serves as a philosophical model that supports the ways in which the conclusions of my research may be applied. Because pragmatism sees truths as being formed collectively through social interaction, Dewey (1916/1997) maintained that social continuity depends on establishing ways in which experiences can be shared with others as meaningful, direction-providing resources. When researchers share the analyzed experiences of those in particular educational situations, they are actually contributing to the resources that may be used by other educators in collective decision-making (T. Anderson, 2000a; Biesta & Burbules, 2003). However, it is not the goal of pragmatically grounded educational inquiry to use research findings as a way to establish mandated rules of practice that educators must use in their educational settings (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Pragmatism does not call for the search of a universal truth that is waiting “out there” to be discovered and dictated to others (James, 1907/1975). If researchers have made their purposes, methods, and conclusions clear, then educators should be able to decide for themselves whether the findings are applicable to their own personal teaching situations.

My goal during the course of this research project was to collect, analyze, and share the experiences of multi-age art teachers in Florida as a way to offer practical suggestions to such multi-age art teachers and those who plan multi-age programs of instruction. These suggestions may aid multi-age art teachers and other multi-age stakeholders in their decision-making and planning processes.

**Qualitative Research Methods and Foundations**

The methodology chosen for this pragmatically framed research study is qualitative in design. Research studies that are field-focused and involve the detailed description of the actions and interactions of humans with each other and their environment on a day-to-day basis are described as qualitative in nature (Eisner, 1998a). Qualitative descriptions should be offered holistically and should not exclude the examination of the inanimate objects within the observed environment. In a qualitative study involving a particular elementary school art teacher, the quality of art materials available to the teacher, the amount of the art teacher’s budget, the state of the art teacher’s classroom (or, perhaps, portable unit or moveable art cart) could all play significant roles in describing an art program. As the qualitative researcher studies the objects, people, and interactions within a chosen environment, it is his or her goal to observe natural,
intact situations without being obtrusive or manipulative (Eisner, 1998a). The objective is to study the situation as it naturally occurs.

Qualitative research methods involve digging deeply into observed phenomenon in order to achieve thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of human experience and the meanings that are attached to those events for those who have lived them (Eisner, 1998a). Those who experience events shape meaning from them, yet the meaning is also formed by their own past experiences as well as their cultural and personal background (Dewey, 1938). Similarly, the qualitative researcher has to acknowledge that he or she brings his or her own experiences with him or her to the field site. The researcher filters the observed phenomena through his or her personal lens, yet makes every effort to characterize situations from the participants’ perspectives (Eisner, 1998a). Because the self is used as the instrument of data collection, the senses of the individual researcher become very important in collecting data through the sights, sounds, taste, touch, and smells that the researcher experiences (Bogdan & Biklan, 2003). This makes data collection very different from quantitative research. The qualitative researcher collects data in the form of pictures, words, and other sensory representations instead of only numbers.

Qualitative research does not start with a hypothesis and attempt to test the hypothesis through experimental research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Instead, the qualitative approach is inductive and the researcher spends considerable time collecting data. In this process of observing phenomenon in natural settings, the qualitative researcher often sorts through collected observations and interviews to see what emerges from the data. I have approached my own inquiry into the topic of multi-age art education in a similar manner. I did not begin the investigation of multi-age art education with a particular hypothesis already in mind. However, the themes that I have found within a review of relevant literature on the topic of multi-age art education were instrumental in framing the research questions of this investigation. As such, I did begin this research with a few initial questions or understandings that I had identified from reviewing relevant literature, but I did not have a particular hypothesized outcome already in mind. The themes from the literature review, then, gave me a prefigured focus (Eisner, 1998a) to my observations. However, without a strict hypothesis in mind, I remained open to the emergent foci that presented themselves along the way (Eisner, 1998a).

Qualitative researchers place a greater concern on process and less emphasis on outcomes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Basically, qualitative research is interested in how people’s’
attitudes formulate their actions, and how they interact with one another. In this sense, qualitative research is more interested in how things occur rather than what the final product or result is. One goal of qualitative research is to detail these processes as they unfold under natural settings.

In this research project, I explored the phenomenon of multi-age art education through the theoretical foundations of qualitative research methods. In this process, I sought emerging meaning through the thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the qualities that characterize the teaching of art to multi-age elementary classes at a selected location. The specific data collection strategies that I used included surveys, observations, and interviews.

**Surveys.** Questionnaires and surveys are a commonly used mode of data collection when obtaining information on characteristics, behaviors, perceptions, recommendations, or practices within larger populations (Babbie, 2004; Hutchinson, 2004). Questionnaires can be used to explore, describe, or explain orientations and attitudes of people through social research. Written surveys should be aesthetically pleasing and the items asked should be reasonably small in number (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). When considering the number of items on a questionnaire, however, survey designers should not exclude questions that seek descriptive background information from respondents (Hutchinson, 2004). Such items can help to provide an overall context and informational foundation for research studies. The questions represented on the survey should be clear to the participants and it is recommended that the survey be pretested prior to the actual administration of the questionnaire (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

When written surveys are used in qualitative research studies, they are typically used as one of several sources of data collection due to the scripted nature of pre-written questionnaire items (Hutchinson, 2004). Such a multimethods approach can be desirable, particularly if one method is used to explain and describe the context in which the situation or experience under investigation occurs and another method is used to explore the experience, itself (Schutz et al., 2004). In this sense, combining survey research with other data collection methods can be used to provide a research study with context as well as with breadth and depth. Furthermore, a multimethods approach can allow for one method of data collection to help determine the course of the other methods that may follow within a research design (Schutz et al., 2004). As such, survey methods can be used within research studies to help determine the remaining course of inquiry.
I initiated the data collection procedures of my research through the distribution of a mailed survey to as many elementary-level, multi-age art teachers in the State of Florida as I could locate within public school systems. The format of the survey as well as many of the questionnaire items themselves were developed by referring to an existing, related study on teachers’ practices and perceptions of delivering instruction to combined grade classes (Virginia Education Association & Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 1990). The structure of the questions that were developed, reworked, and adapted from this existing study, can be classified in similar categories as those recommended by Seidman (1998) for conducting qualitative interviews. Specifically, the survey gathered background and contextual information on the multi-age art teachers, information on the details of their multi-age teaching practices, and information on their perceptions toward teaching in a multi-age environment. The survey was a useful instrument for initiating my data collection procedures for two reasons: (a) The results of the survey were used to provide both context and breadth for the study by collecting qualitatively descriptive information on a broad scale (Hutchinson, 2004), and (b) as a tool for purposively selecting a qualitative observation site (Schutz et al., 2004).

Observations. Observation was used as part of the data collection and inquiry process in this proposed research project because qualitative information on the act of teaching may best be collected in natural settings. (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Eisner, 1998a). Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) explain that if researchers are interested in what people actually do in certain contexts, such as teaching art in multi-age classrooms, “there is no substitute for watching them” (p. 450). Studying real-life situations as they naturally unfold demands that the observer must not attempt to control the situation or manipulate any variables that may present themselves (Eisner, 1998a). Naturalistic observations require researchers to immerse themselves within their chosen settings in order to focus on recording events as they normally develop. To obtain deeper understanding of art instruction in a nongraded learning environment, I observed a multi-age art classroom during the course of the proposed study. Single-site qualitative observations can be used to provide interested practitioners with in-depth, vicarious access to unique or exceptional cases that would not receive complete attention in research studies that report findings only in aggregates (Donmoyer, 1990). In order to satisfy the complete immersion of the researcher within his or her chosen unique environment as recommended by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), a multi-age program with near or complete nongradedness that typified the
characteristics of multi-age instruction described in salient literature (and as revealed by the survey results) was selected for naturalistic observation.

During my visits to the selected multi-age art program, I continuously recorded observations in the form of richly detailed fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 1995). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state that accurate findings in almost any qualitative study directly depend on the thorough recording of descriptive and detailed fieldnotes. My observational fieldnotes were written following the recommendations of Emerson et al. Fieldnotes were first written on-site with great attention to detail. In order to accurately record what has been observed, qualitative researchers can augment their written observations with sketches, drawings, photographs, and bits of audio recordings, unless the use of such techniques appears to be too intrusive (T. Anderson, 2000a; Emerson et al.). Due to stipulations put forth in my human subjects application, I used photography and additional recordings on a limited basis, usually only to jog my own memory and usually when students were not in the multi-age art classroom. The confidentiality of my participants was maintained and I did not have permission to reproduce individual works of student art that were easily identifiable. Photographs could not be used that directly revealed the identities of participants. Some photography was used, but only if the images were deemed non-descript and did not directly reveal the name of the people and places involved.

After each observation session, my fieldnotes were taken home for re-writing, clarification, and expansion. During this process of writing up (Emerson et al., 1995), anecdotal memos, and reflective remarks were added to the fieldnotes as I mindfully clarified and typed up what I had observed and experienced. Such reflective remarks and memos were used to help organize data and to note leads for further investigation within the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The writing up process, then, helped me to stay focused on the research questions at hand yet still allowed for the appearance of new emergent foci (Eisner, 1998a) as well.

**Interviews.** In qualitative research, interviews are used in order to collect data through a participant’s own words. This allows the researcher some insight into the subject’s perception on a particular topic and may even help him or her to see how a participant makes meaning from experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Babbie (2004) points out that sometimes we can observe the actions of people without knowing the reasons or meanings behind their actions. Qualitative
interviewing gives researchers an opportunity to dig deeper into observed phenomena in order to understand the perceptions and experiences of others.

I chose the use of interviews in my study as a way to allow the perceptions and meanings of the selected multi-age art instructor to emerge from her own words and experiences. The interviews clarified some of my own observations in the multi-age art room setting, and helped to put the actions and decisions of the multi-age art teacher into a personal context.

Qualitative interviews can be characterized as conversations that have a general purpose or direction to them as supplied by the interviewer (Babbie, 2004). The researcher should have a developed plan of organization for his or her interview, but must be flexible and open to emerging topics as presented by participants during conversation. In preparation for this research project, I developed an interview checklist that was adapted from a three step interview series recommended by Seidman (1998). Three interviews were conducted with the selected multi-age art teacher in order to develop rapport with her and to uncover deeper meaning through personal conversation (Seidman, 1998). The three interviews that were conducted with the multi-age art teacher followed a pattern of questions on focused life history, the details of experience, and reflections on meaning. The findings from the qualitative observations and interviews were compared and corroborated with the broad contextual findings from the survey research in order to reach conclusions of both breadth and depth.

Having restated and clarified the theoretical foundations of my research methods and the theoretical framework for my investigation into multi-age art education, I will next present my research strategies more specifically and in greater detail.

**Research Overview**

The collection of data and subsequent analysis of data for this research project took place in five phases. The first phase involved the establishment of a theoretical position for the study by reviewing, compiling, and synthesizing relevant literature on multi-age art education and qualitative research. My efforts in this phase of research have already been represented within Chapter 2 of this dissertation and have been discussed earlier in this chapter as well.

The second phase of research involved locating multi-age, public elementary schools within the State of Florida. This phase of the research began as a snowball sample (Babbie,
2004) conducted under the supervision of a professor from the Department of Art Education at Florida State University during the fall semester of 2004.

The third phase of the proposed research included the distribution and analysis of a written survey to all of the elementary level, multi-age art instructors who were located through the snowball sample. The results of the survey served as a major informational component of this study by providing the initial contextual and descriptive information (Hutchinson, 2004) on the multi-age art teachers, their practices, and their attitudes and perceptions toward multi-age art instruction. Secondly, the results of the survey were also used to guide the fourth phase of data collection in a multimethods approach (Schutz et al., 2004). The results of the survey were used as a tool for purposively selecting a single qualitative observation site that could provide readers with in-depth, unique information that is specific rather than generalized and aggregated (Donmoyer, 1990). A multi-age art program was selected that showed a high degree of nongradedness that typified the characteristics of multi-age education expressed within the review of literature. The site selection of the multi-age art classroom and art teacher to participate in further qualitative studies, then, represents the fourth phase of this research project.

The fifth phase involved the observation and associated interviews of the selected multi-age art teacher, in order to gain insight into her practices and perceptions of teaching multi-age art as well as the meanings that this act held for her.

Snowball Sample

With the first phase of research, the literature review, already in hand, I will now address the second phase of this study. Since there is no existing list of all the public elementary schools in the State of Florida with multi-age programs, the first step in obtaining a sample for survey research was simply to find the schools with art teachers who could participate. Considering this, a snowball sampling technique was most appropriate (Babbie, 2004). Snowball sampling involves collecting data from those individuals that a researcher can locate, and then asking these same participants to help provide information that will lead to other applicable participants.

I purposively began my snowball sample by contacting teachers and administrators in one school district in northern Florida and one school district in central Florida where I already knew that multi-age programs had been implemented. The contacts in these two school districts led to the location of other possible multi-age art classrooms in neighboring counties. This snowball effect continued from contact source to contact source and from school district to school district...
as more multi-age art programs were identified. During these inquiries, the criteria for possible participation was set and described as any art teacher who currently instructs visual arts to multi-age groups of students while working in a public elementary school within the State of Florida. It was assumed that each contact person was truthful in his or her response to my inquiries. If an individual characterized his or her school as having a multi-age art program in place, I accepted this characterization since it was not feasible to investigate the authenticity of each multi-age art program at each school site.

Additional possible participants were located through personal contacts and extensive Internet searches for multi-age programs within the State of Florida. In this process, an electronic mail inquiry was also sent to an organization known as Staff Development for Educators. This organization has been responsible for organizing the National Conference of Best Practices for Looping & Multiage Classrooms for the past 12 years (Staff Development for Educators, 2004). This organization was asked if it could aid in my research project by providing further information as to the location of multi-age school sites in Florida. Unfortunately the organization declined to assist due to the privacy rights of those who participated in their conferences.

Likewise, personal electronic mail messages were also sent to five former or current professors of education who are or have been affiliated with the State University System of Florida. These professors have collectively worked at four different universities within Florida that are geographically diverse in terms of their separate locations within the northern, central, and southern regions of the state. One of the professors lists multi-aged classrooms as an area of interest on a public web site (CERDS Faculty, 2004) and two others have previously published literature on the subject (Fu et al., 1999; Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). All of the professors were asked to assist in providing information as to the names and locations of nongraded schools in Florida. Unfortunately, the professors did not contribute any new multi-age school sites to the snowball sample. Specifically, two of the professors did not respond to repeated contact attempts, while one stated that he or she had no knowledge as to the location of multi-age school sites. However, two of the professors did confirm the existence of multi-age school sites that I had already identified.

Literature on the subject of multi-age education was also useful in locating multi-age school sites in Florida. Several published accounts directly refer to multi-age elementary
programs within the state (Heins et al., 2000; Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Fu et al., 1999). Once again, these schools were contacted in order to confirm or deny that multi-age structures still existed within their schools or if they could provide information as to the whereabouts of other multi-age school sites. In one case, a multi-age homeroom teacher was listed by name in a printed source (Kasten & Clarke, 1993), but further investigation revealed that she no longer worked at the school designated within the text. An Internet search for the teacher’s name on a school district website later revealed that this same teacher had transferred to a new school within Florida. She was then contacted by e-mail and it was revealed that she had taken the multi-age model of instruction with her and implemented it at her new location. It was further determined that her students did indeed attend art class in multi-age groups.

Through the snowball sampling process, 66 public elementary schools in the State of Florida that have been suggested to have multi-age programs were identified. These schools represent a variety of regions within Florida, and include 16 different school districts. Each of these schools was contacted through either electronic mail or by telephone in order to determine if each school truly does contain an eligible participant to complete a written survey for my research study. The criteria for possible participation was set as any art teacher who currently instructs visual arts to multi-age groups of students while working in a public elementary school within the State of Florida.

At the conclusion of the snowball sampling process, school district personnel representing 50 of the identified elementary schools responded by confirming that they do have multi-age art education programs within these schools. The 50 elementary schools collectively represent 71 multi-age art teachers who were eligible to participate in the written survey, as some schools have more than one art teacher at their multi-age school site. The 71 eligible participants represent 11 different counties in Florida, ranging from the northern, central, and southern regions of the state.

Of the remaining 16 schools, from the 66 first identified, 4 elementary schools did not respond to repeated attempts at inquiry, and 12 other elementary schools did respond by stating that they do not meet the criteria required to participate in the study. Of the 12 respondents, 2 schools reported that their institutions do not contain a visual arts teacher within their staff. In 2 more cases, the schools stated that they have never had a multi-age program and that the information I had received during my snowball sampling procedures was inaccurate. Another
school was unclear in reporting whether or not they had a multi-age art program, except to say that they were not interested in participating in the study.

In three more instances, schools reported that they have discontinued their multi-age programs altogether. It is interesting to briefly note that two of these schools had administrators who felt compelled to add that they regretted discontinuing their multi-age programs and that they still philosophically support the model itself. Two administrators (although not exactly the same pair of administrators) also expressed that the state mandating of high-stakes, standardized tests applied across grade levels played a factor in the decision to discontinue the multi-age programs at their school sites. The comments volunteered by these administrators may reflect the perception that multi-age models of instruction have poor compatibility with accountability measures that are tied to the administration of standardized tests at specific grade levels (Cushman, 1993).

In the remaining four cases, the schools stated that they do indeed feature some multi-age classrooms, but that these multi-age groups attend their visual art classes in traditional age-graded groups rather than heterogeneous groupings. It was implied that the special area teachers at these schools were given a choice as to whether or not they were willing to instruct students in multi-age groups and that the special area teachers declined to participate. Although these four cases will not meet the criteria for participation in my study, they are interesting to note for two reasons. First, it appears as if these cases may represent instances where multi-age education was not mandated or forced upon art teachers as was recommended by Otto (1969) and by Kasten and Lolli (1998). On the other hand, if art teachers refuse to participate and instead ask the multi-age homeroom teachers to send their mixed-age students to art class in traditional grade level groups, they would, in effect, be breaking another tenet of multi-age philosophies. When possible, no grade level distinctions, terminology, or same age groupings should be used in true multi-age learning environments (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). This possible contradiction that emerges within the tenets of multi-age education when art teachers are given a choice as to their participation in nongraded structures will receive further attention throughout this research project.

Although these internal, philosophical contradictions will be discussed in this study, the specific four cases identified in the snowball sample where such contradictions manifested themselves will not. Unfortunately, these four cases lie beyond the scope of my study. My
research goals appropriately focus on schools where multi-age art education has been implemented, rather than on schools where it has not.

**Survey**

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) recommend using already developed instrumentation for collecting data, rather than dealing with the difficult task of developing new, and valid instrumentation. Considering this, I developed the format of the survey as well as the questionnaire items themselves by referring to an existing, related study on teacher’s practices and perceptions of delivering instruction to combined grade classes (Virginia Education Association & Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 1990). Since this original study was used to collect information from homeroom teachers’ perspectives, some questions had to be adapted or eliminated in order to be applicable to multi-age art teachers. Eight new questionnaire items were added to the survey in order to collect information on the following topics: (a) the degree of nongradedness represented by the art teachers’ school sites (b) the organizational structure of multi-age classes, (c) the use of thematic instruction, (d) the location from which multi-age art instruction was delivered, (e) the art teachers’ personal philosophies or theoretical orientations toward art education, (f) the perceived congruence between the art teachers’ educational philosophies and the philosophies of multi-age education, (g) the art teachers’ overall support or opposition to mixed-age groupings in the art room, and (h) the respondent’s willingness to be involved in further qualitative data collection on this topic.

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) recommend that surveys developed for research in education should be pretested prior to the actual administration of the questionnaire. I sent an initial draft of my survey to a committee of reviewers in order to check for content validation. The committee members included one professor from the Department of Educational Theory and Policy Studies from Florida State University and approximately 22 doctoral students who were studying social survey research in education. Revisions were made after periodic meetings with the professor and again after a group meeting that included the entire class of doctoral students. This version of the survey was then presented to and discussed with a professor from the Department of Art Education at Florida State University in order to check for content concerns within the discipline for which it was designed. Several electronic messages were also traded with the professor before final revisions were made to the survey.
The resulting 20-item survey (see Appendix A) contains two parts. The first part includes 11 close-ended questions that ask the multi-age art teacher to describe his or her background in terms of instructional experience, experience teaching to multi-age groups, and the conditions under which he or she delivers multi-age art instruction. The second part includes nine questions related to the perceptions and opinions of the multi-age art teacher. Seven of those nine questions are at least partially open-ended in nature.

After receiving permission to conduct research from both Florida State University (see Appendix B) and the 11 school districts that collectively contain 50 multi-age art programs, I mailed a cover letter (see Appendix C), an informed consent form (see Appendix D), a written survey, and a self-addressed stamped return envelope to each of the 71 eligible multi-age art teachers who were identified during the snowball sampling search. In an effort to collect as much contextual information as possible, I followed two methods shown to be consistent for ensuring a high response rate to mailed surveys (Green & Hutchinson, 1996). Specifically, I designed and included an incentive for potential participants to return a completed survey in a timely fashion and I sent two reminder notices at periodic intervals to those who had not yet returned a survey. For the incentive, each cover letter contained a raffle ticket entry form (see Appendix C) that would earn the respondent a chance to win a $50 gift certificate to an art supply vendor. The two reminder notices (see Appendixes E and F) each contained an additional survey and an additional self-addressed stamped envelope in case the potential respondent had lost or misplaced these items from the initial mailings. The last reminder notice included a token of my appreciation in the form of a set of three or four slides of art historical examples from my personal collection.

Overall, 38 of the 71 potential respondents returned completed surveys for an initial 53.52% response rate. Upon further inspection of the surveys, I learned that 2 of these respondents returned their questionnaires and appropriately answered the first question by stating that they actually did not deliver art instruction to multi-age groups during the current academic year. One of these respondents explained that his or her school does indeed still have two multi-age classes in existence at his or her school site. However, the school also has two full-time art teachers as employees. The schedule of art classes for the current school year had happened to assign both multi-age classes to the other art teacher, thus leaving this particular respondent unable to participate according to the guidelines established by the directions of the survey. The
other survey respondent who returned his or her questionnaire indicating that he or she did not teach multi-age art classes did not offer any additional information as to the previous existence or absence of multi-age art classes at his or her school site. In consideration of the misidentification of these two potential participants as multi-age art teachers, I made appropriate adjustments to my initial figures and calculated a new response rate. With these adjustments in mind, I could more accurately state that 36 art teachers who taught multi-age art during the 2005 – 2006 academic year returned completed surveys out of a possible 69 potential respondents. The adjustment in figures results in a 52.17% response rate.

I will briefly restate that the purpose of the survey was to collect qualitatively descriptive information on a broad scale that could be used to establish the initial context of multi-age art education that would be referred to throughout the remainder of this study. Furthermore, the results of the survey were also used as a tool for purposively selecting the observation site used in phase four of my research.

**Site Selection for Naturalistic Observations**

The selection of the multi-age art classroom and teacher to be used for observations began once the surveys were returned (see example in Appendix G) and analyzed. Using the findings from the survey, one public elementary school in the State of Florida where students attend visual art classes in multi-age groups was selected for additional data collection through naturalistic observations. The selection of this multi-age program represents a purposive sample (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Purposive samples are frequently used in qualitative studies when a researcher purposefully selects a particular participant or participants for observations based on unique criteria that are relevant to the objectives of the research.

Donmoyer (1990) indicates that there is much heuristic value in single-site investigations within qualitative inquiries related to the fields of education, social work, and counseling. While aggregates of information, such as those provided by the mailed questionnaires, are useful in research studies, teachers are largely concerned with individuals, perspective, and meaning. Single-site qualitative studies allow practitioners to vicariously experience a unique individual or situation that they may not have encountered on their own. In depth access to a specific situation that is unique or exceptional in quality allows teachers to integrate new strategies or instructional possibilities into their cognitive schemas (Donmoyer, 1990; Piaget, 1971) or instructional repertoires.
In the case of my research project, the survey results were used to choose a multi-age art program based on the degree of its nongradedness, the presence of typical characteristics cited in multi-age literature, and the willingness of the art teacher to participate in observations and interviews. On one hand, the selected art program contained the potential to typify the ideals cited in multi-age literature. On the other hand, the art program also contained the potential to be extremely unique, or perhaps even exceptional, for its ability to put these ideals into real-world practice. It is this sort of purposively selected uniqueness that makes single-site qualitative observations useful as vicarious contributors to the schema of educators (Donmoyer, 1990).

In respect to this unique selection process, preliminary investigations have revealed that some schools only contain one or two multi-age classrooms mixed in with traditional graded models of instruction, while other schools were described as completely multi-age in organization (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). In order to satisfy the complete immersion of the researcher within his or her chosen environment as recommended by Emerson et al. (1995), a multi-age art program with near or complete nongradedness was selected for naturalistic observations.

With this thought in mind, I began my selection process by limiting the number of potential observation participants to just those survey respondents who reported working at school sites that were completely multi-age in design and those who had reported working with 20 or more multi-age classes during a school year. By the end of the sorting process, I had created a list of 13 potential participants who appeared to work at schools that featured near or complete nongradedness. From these 13 potential participants, I was now hoping to select a multi-age art program that most typified the characteristics cited in multi-age literature. I compared the content of the survey questions with my literature review and decided that I would make my decision based on the following characteristics: (a) the degree of professional autonomy involved in the art teachers’ participation in multi-age art education (Otto, 1969; Kasten & Lolli, 1998), (b) the use of thematic integration and instruction (Kasten & Clarke, 1993), (c) the use of classroom space that allows for student grouping (Cushman, 1993), (d) the use of learning centers (Cushman, 1993), (e) the presence of an integrative curriculum (Miletta, 1996), (f) the use of cooperative learning groups (Gaustad, 1993; Hallion, 1994), (g) the facilitation of student peer tutoring or peer assistance (Elkind, 1993; Hunter 1992), (h) the participation in staff development training (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Appalachia Educational...
Laboratory, 1991; Kasten & Lolli, 1998), and (i) the willingness of the multi-age art teacher to be observed and interviewed.

Using only the surveys returned by the 13 respondents on my narrowed list, I charted the responses of each participant in regard to the characteristics listed above. The results of my tabulations can be seen in Table 1. I chose respondent #3 because she was calculated to have the highest frequency of characteristics cited in multi-age literature and had also indicated her willingness to participate in naturalistic observations and interviews in her response to questionnaire item 20. Overall, she had reported (a) the use of theme-based instruction that was, at times, integrated with the multi-age homeroom themes, (b) the use of space for student groupings, (c) an integrative approach to curricula, (d) the use of cooperative learning groups, (e) the facilitation of student peer tutoring and peer assistance, (f) that she had helped to develop, write, and implement a three-day professional training workshop on multi-age education for art, music, and physical education instructors, and (g) that she was willing to participate in qualitative observations and interviews.

After choosing the teacher to be observed and interviewed, it was necessary to contact the selected multi-age art teacher in order to obtain additional permission through a separate informed consent form before the qualitative visitations could officially begin (see Appendix H). The respondent, her principal, and her school district’s arts supervisor were all contacted in order to inform them of my selection and to confirm that the multi-age art teacher was still willing to participate and that the principal had also approved. Although the school district in question had already approved all phases of my research prior to the mailing of the questionnaires, I was required to go through a finger printing and background check procedure now that it had become official that I would be physically entering one of their school sites. During the clearance process, I also stopped by the selected school site to introduce myself to the principal and the selected multi-age art teacher. We also took the opportunity to organize a tentative schedule for qualitative observations and interviews. Due to the stipulations involved in the approval process for this research project, all proper nouns associated with the names of people and places observed in this study have been replaced with pseudonyms. From this point forward, the selected multi-age art teacher will be referred to as Alice Pratt and her school will be referred to as Rexrode Elementary School.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Respondent #</th>
<th>Prof. Autonomy (Given Choice?)</th>
<th>Theme-Based Integration and Instruction</th>
<th>Space for Student Groupings</th>
<th>Use of Learning Centers</th>
<th>Integrative Curriculum</th>
<th>Cooperative Learning Groups</th>
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Observation Sessions

After choosing the observation site, it was necessary to contact the selected multi-age art teacher in order to obtain additional permission through a separate informed consent form before the qualitative visitations could officially begin (see Appendix H). Bogden and Biklen (2003) recommend that qualitative researchers schedule repeated contacts at a selected fieldsite rather than one or two snapshot visits. Repeated observations help the researcher to obtain a greater variety of observed circumstances. Repeated observations also allow those observed to become accustomed to the presence of the researcher and more likely to talk and act as they naturally do. Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend that observations should continue until a saturation point has been reached in data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Saturation occurs when continued observations result in redundant data and nothing new is revealed to the researcher.

In the case of my investigation into multi-age art education, I observed and interacted with the selected multi-age art teacher, Alice Pratt, during instructional school days for approximately 25 hours stretched out over a three-week period in April and early May of 2006. Another hour or so was spent observing students, parents, Ms. Pratt, and other faculty members during Rexrode Elementary School’s annual after-school art exhibit scheduled in early May. In addition to these observations, I have also communicated with the Ms. Pratt via telephone calls and e-mail communications in order to clarify observed details. During my observations in Ms. Pratt’s art room, I continuously wrote field notes that focused on rich details, the research questions at hand, and other emergent foci (Eisner, 1998a). Afterwards, the fieldnotes were taken home for re-writing, clarification, and expansion (see example in Appendix I). During this process of writing up (Emerson et al., 1995), I used different fonts to distinguish my descriptive observations from my reflective personal interpretations.

Interview Sessions

In order to achieve deeper understanding of the instruction of art to multi-age groups of students as well as the meaning that this act holds for the selected multi-age art teacher, I also conducted several interviews with Alice Pratt at Rexrode Elementary School. The interviews provided a better understanding of her perceptions toward multi-age art instruction as well as the purposes behind her actions and decision-making processes. Three formal interviews were scheduled, conducted, and tape-recorded with Ms. Pratt during the fifth phase of data collection. The interviews were held during her planning periods when her room was empty, quiet, and did
not offer significant distraction (Seidman, 1998). The interviews did not directly interfere with Ms. Pratt’s scheduled interaction with students or her use of instructional time.

I created interview checklists and used them as a way to stay focused on the research questions at hand (see Appendix J). These checklists were adapted from a three-step interview series recommended by Seidman (1998). The checklists followed a pattern of questions based on focused life history, the details of experience, and reflections on meaning. Three interview sessions were conducted with Ms. Pratt in order to develop rapport with the multi-age art teacher and to uncover deeper meaning through personal conversation (Seidman, 1998). After the completion of each interview, I transcribed all audio recordings at home on a word processing computer program (see example in Appendix K). During this process, I started to add anecdotal notes and memos to the transcribed interviews as a way to begin data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

While the use of interviews was an important method of data collection for my research, that is not to say that the interviews were the only verbal exchanges of importance to my investigation into multi-age art education. Casual conversations and informal exchanges with the subjects of a study may help to support, clarify, contradict, or give context to the information collected through both qualitative observations and interviews (Goodall, 2000). Verbal exchanges of all types have the potential to be important sources of data collection in qualitative research. Therefore, my observational fieldnotes did not just document what I had observed in the multi-age art classroom, but also documented the casual conversations that occurred throughout the multi-age school setting. As often as possible, I attempted to tape record these casual conversations, while still staying within the parameters allowed by the school district within which the observations and interviews had taken place. Whether tape-recorded or jotted within a journal, “verbal exchanges are the organizing focus of everyday experience, and as such, these exchanges represent a fundamental way to create fieldnotes” (Goodall, 2000, p. 98).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

In general, Eisner (1998a) describes the processes of qualitative research as involving the steps of observing, describing, interpreting, and evaluating settings as they naturally occur. T. Anderson (2000b) uses similar steps in describing a method for a particular approach to qualitative research, known as critical ethnography. This method was developed by applying art
criticism strategies to ethnographic research methods as a way to enhance qualitative studies in art education. For T. Anderson (2000b), the steps of ethnographic criticism are clearly defined and labeled as the following stages: (a) immersion and response, (b) description, (c) interpretation, and (d) evaluation. For both Eisner (1998a) and T. Anderson (2000b), the process of qualitative research gradually develops from one that primarily describes observed settings, to one that analyzes, interprets, and ultimately evaluates them. “The longer the descriptive . . . process goes on, the more strongly the researcher turns to connection-making, trying to construct an interpretation, a narrative, a story, a framework that will make sense of what is found. . . . This is where interpretation begins” (T. Anderson, 2000b, p. 84).

Throughout the course of this research project, my investigation of multi-age art education gradually shifted from one of description, to one of analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. With this in mind, I will now describe my approach to analyzing the data that was collected for this study. It should be noted that data analysis for my research project took place in several phases that eventually overlapped in corroborated comparison. Beyond the analysis of salient literature presented in Chapter 2, the next significant phase of data analysis involved the examination of results provided by the written surveys sent to the identified multi-age art teachers. The results of the survey served as a major informational component of the study by providing a broad foundation and the initial contextual information (Hutchinson, 2004) on multi-age art instruction at the elementary level in the State of Florida. The next phase of data analysis involved an examination of the information collected during qualitative observations and interviews. All of these sources (literature, surveys, observations, and interviews) were compared and corroborated when presenting qualitative findings and conclusions.

**Analyzing the Survey Results**

Beyond the review of literature and the snowball sampling procedures, the next phase of data analysis began as the written surveys completed by the multi-age art teachers were completed and returned. Because the site selection of the multi-age art program to be observed depended on the information obtained from the surveys, this analysis of data had to be conducted prior to the scheduling of qualitative observations and interviews.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the multi-age art teachers used for survey research were located through snowball sampling techniques (Babbie, 2004). Since there is no existing list of all the public elementary schools in the State of Florida with multi-age art programs, a
snowball sample had to be conducted in order to locate eligible multi-age art teachers to participate in survey research. Snowball sampling involves collecting data from those individuals that a researcher can locate, and then asking these same participants to help provide information that will lead to other applicable participants.

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) describe snowball sampling as a purposive, nonprobability method of data collection. Due to the lack of generalizability usually associated with nonprobability sampling methods, it would be inappropriate to discuss the use of inferential statistics when analyzing the data collected from the surveys. The responses to the close-ended questions of the survey were analyzed, counted, and recorded on tabulation sheets and charts. The tabulation charts documented the frequency of responses and also provided retrieval information that described the original source of each answer (see example in Appendix L). The results represented purely descriptive statistical data that I often entered into computer programs such as the statistical program for social science, SPSS, in order to translate the figures into percentages, frequency tables, bar graphs, or crossbreak tables.

The data collected from the open-ended survey questions, however, required careful content analysis and coding before any results could be transferred into descriptive statistics or qualitative narratives (Babbie, 2004). For the coding of open-ended questionnaire items, researchers sort through their data and assign summative phrases, or codes, to regularly occurring themes in respondents’ answers to specific questions. By clustering and compiling answers to specific questions in categories of like-themes, researchers can still present findings from open-ended questions in the form of descriptive statistics if necessary (Babbie, 2004). However, unlike responses to close-ended questions, the researcher will also have the added advantage of being able to pull representative or direct quotes from individual surveys and using them in qualitative narratives. This process of coding and content analysis is similar to the methods used in the existing study on teachers’ practices and perceptions of instructing students in combined grade classes (Virginia Education Association & Appalachia Laboratory, 1990). This is the same study that was used as the initial model for survey instrument development.

In terms of applying this method of coding to the analysis of my own open-ended survey questions, I began this process with some prefigured foci (Eisner, 1998a) or prefigured codes already in mind. The codes that were developed in advance reflected the themes that were discussed within my literature review and that were used to develop the supporting questions for
this study. Examples of prefigured coding categories that I used when analyzing the survey
results included the following: (a) the use of scaffolding techniques within multi-age art classes,
(b) the presence of developmental differences within multi-age groups of art students, (c)
variations on the possible philosophical orientations of art teachers (creative self expression,
visual culture art education, discipline based art education), (d) multi-age training, (e) the
support or opposition of thematic integration, and (f) the effect of flexible grouping on art room
rosters. I then reviewed the responses of the open-ended survey questions line by line and
assigned these prefigured codes and charted them on tabulation sheets and charts.

However, simply assigning prefigured codes to the open-ended survey responses was
merely one part of the coding process. In regard to analyzing qualitative data, Miles and
Huberman (1994) state that “there is more going on out there than our initial frames have
dreamed of, and few field researchers are foolish enough to avoid looking for these things” (p.
61). A second round of analysis, then, was in order with the application of an open coding
(Emerson et al., 1995) approach rather than a prefigured coding approach. Open coding avoids
the use of pre-constructed categories and instead attends to unexpected patterns, themes, or
emergent foci (Eisner, 1998a) that present themselves within qualitative data. As I tabulated
responses from the open-ended survey questions, I paid special attention to those answers that
were unexpected and did not fit into the prefigured categories that I had already developed. I
kept track of these unexpected responses on a separate sheet of notebook paper for each open-
ended question. Using the content of these responses as a guide, I inductively formed emergent
codes that helped to categorize the unexpected answers and added these new themes to my
tabulation sheets. In consideration of the emergence of the new foci, I went through the open-
ended questionnaire answers again and re-tabulated the responses on adapted tabulation sheets
(see Appendix M). Once again, the final results were often entered into computer programs
such, SPSS, in order to translate the figures into percentages, frequency tables, or bar graphs.

The data collected from the surveys provided foundational breadth for the study in the
form of important descriptive and contextual information (Hutchinson, 2004) about the various
multi-age art classrooms, schools, and teachers. This information helped to answer the research
questions at hand, but was also used to set the stage for the next phase of data collection in the
proposed research project (Schutz et al., 2004). As detailed earlier, the findings from the surveys
were also used to select a qualitative observation site.
Analyzing Fieldnotes and Interview Transcripts

Once the multi-age art program at Rexrode Elementary had been selected for qualitative observations, additional data were collected in the form of observational fieldnotes and transcribed interviews with the multi-age art teacher, Alice Pratt. The examination of the collected fieldnotes and transcribed interviews represented the next stage of data analysis. Some of the first steps in analyzing this data actually occurred during the collection of the data itself. Creswell (1994) recommends that qualitative data analysis be conducted simultaneously with data collection. In the case of this research project, such an analysis began as I wrote up (Emerson et al., 1995) my fieldnotes, and transcribed my audio recordings by typing them into a word processing program after each visit to the multi-age school site. During this process, reflective remarks, memos, and marginal remarks were added to the transcriptions with different fonts as I mindfully re-wrote what I had observed and heard. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe these notational devices as excellent tools for qualitative researchers to use when thinking about their data during early stages of analysis. Memos, marginal remarks, and reflective remarks are used for the clarification of ideas, to hold places for leads and further investigation, and to aid in the organization of data.

Organizing and coding the data. After reviewing the fieldnotes and interviews with their newly added memos and remarks, I turned to a similar strategy of organizational analysis as was used for interpreting the open-ended survey answers. To be more specific, the next stage of data analysis involved the creation of codes to be applied to my typed-up fieldnotes and interview transcripts. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe the development of coding categories as a crucial stage in analyzing qualitative data. During this process, researchers sort through their data in search of regularly occurring topics, phrases, themes, and patterns of behavior. As these regularities are identified, the researcher also creates phrases, abbreviations, or words that can sum up and represent these repeated topics. These representational phrases are known as codes or coding categories.

For the purposes of analyzing my own fieldnotes and transcripts, I once again used the coding process in a similar manner to the method described for analyzing the open-ended survey questions. That is to say that I first attended to prefigured codes derived from the literature review and supporting questions before moving on to an open coding approach. Qualitative researchers may begin the coding process with some predetermined codes, or prefigured foci
(Eisner, 1998a), already in mind. However, researchers should also remain open to creating new
codes in response to emergent themes and foci that unexpectedly present themselves within the
data (Eisner, 1998a). Having a prefigured focus, rather than none at all, may actually make
unexpected events stand out that much more (Eisner, 1998a). Codes often have to be created,
tried, and revised until workable models are developed.

Once both prefigured and emergent coding categories have been defined, the next step in
analysis is to review the collected data once again and physically revise, edit, and re-assign these
codes to chunks of data as they appear in fieldnotes and transcribed interviews. Miles and
Huberman (1994) state that the assignment of codes to chunked data helps researchers to group
and organize their findings in such a way that sets the stage for reporting qualitative conclusions.
Researchers can take the coded chunks of data from their sources and compile, cluster, and
condense them onto index cards known as qualitative data category cards (Miles & Huberman,
1994). Such category cards can be structured to help researchers keep track of the frequency of
coded responses, and can also include retrieval information that describes the location of these
codes within the initial data sources.

In applying this strategy to my own research, I reviewed all of my written data line-by-
line and used colored pencils to assign color-coordinated prefigured and emergent codes when
they were applicable (see example in Appendixes N and O). I then took the coded chunks of
data from all three sources (coded surveys, fieldnotes, and interviews) and compiled, clustered,
and condensed them onto qualitative data category cards (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The
category cards contained the title of the general code that was identified and clustered, a brief
description of each specific occurrence that was placed there, and retrieval information that
described the location of these occurrences in the initial data sources (see examples in Appendix
P).

**Generating themes and patterns.** After completing the category cards, I returned to the
written surveys, interview transcripts, and observational fieldnotes in order to search for themes
that permeated the collective data on multi age art education. Eisner (1998a) states that
qualitative researchers can use their notes, transcripts, and coded category cards to inductively
formulate themes that provide cohesive focus when analyzing data and reaching conclusions.
Examples of themes that I identified during this stage of analysis included the following: (a)
organization by developmental level, (b) flexible regrouping, (c) looping, (d) thematic
integration, (e) scaffolding, (f) professional autonomy, (g) training, and (h) sameness with graded structures.

After identifying such themes and patterns, I began to search for connections and causal relationships between the established codes and these existing themes. In this process, I looked for ways in which the codes could be used to explain the emergence of these patterns and themes. It is the identification of and reflection on such themes that allows qualitative researchers to inductively create theories, make connections to existing theoretical frameworks, or even integrate existing frameworks into their own newly created ideas (Emerson et al., 1995). As I searched for meaning in the data that I had collected, it was important that I kept the project’s research questions in focus and used the new findings to shed light on my intended queries about the character of multi-age art instruction.

**Reporting the Study as Written Narratives**

The format of this research report, including analysis, and findings, is often presented in the form of written narratives. Eisner (1998a) suggests a method of qualitative analysis in which the researcher sorts and selects from his or her data specific instances, episodes, or days that are rich in detail and representative of the major themes emerging from the study. The selected episodes are displayed in a narrative form that may include expressive language, or empathy, in order to provide opportunities for clear and rich interpretations by both researchers and readers. Emerson et al. (1995) refer to the use of qualitative narratives as excerpt commentary units and describe such a method as an effective way to interweave fieldnotes with more elaborate analyses. Goodall (2000) advocates the use of a narrative or creative approach to qualitative research writing as well. This particular approach is referred to as the *new ethnography* and allows for evocative, story-telling representations of fieldwork experiences, provided that the researcher does not make things up. Presenting ethnographic or qualitative findings as written narratives is to interpret analyses through “the act of telling a story – a ‘true’ one – about the meaning and value of the situation the researcher is investigating” (T. Anderson, 2000b, p. 84). This research report uses such written narratives as a primary method for telling the “true” story of multi-age art instruction in Florida’s public elementary schools.
Credibility and Authenticity

Credibility within qualitative research studies refers to the meaningfulness of findings in relationship to the purposes and specific questions that were asked (Patton, 1980). Not only must the concluding perspectives be relevant to its respective research questions, but these findings should also be clear, understandable, and should hold up under scrutiny. To establish the credibility of qualitative findings, researchers must first scrutinize their own work and verify their own findings by making some of these efforts visible to those who read their research reports. If qualitative researchers involved in educational criticism have been clear in describing their perspectives as well as the purposes, methodologies and conclusions of their research, then their findings become more credible, and educators should be able to determine for themselves the applicability of such research findings to their own individual teaching situations (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Eisner, 1998a).

Structural Corroboration

This research project used multiple sources of data collection and multiple perspectives as one way to establish the credibility and authenticity of its conclusions. The structural corroboration, or triangulation, of findings from multiple instruments of data collection is a crucial step in establishing the credibility of findings obtained through qualitative observations (Eisner, 1998a). Many sources were used within this research study in order to present a credible characterization of multi-age art education. These sources of data included the initial understandings derived from the literature review, the broad perspective and context provided by the survey research, and the qualitative depth provided by observations and interviews.

As I compared the data collected from these multiple sources, I looked for confirmations as well as contradictions between the various methods of data collection (Eisner, 1998a). When more than one method reveals similar findings, the researcher can feel confident in reporting credible and authentic conclusions (Schutz et al., 2004). Contradictions found between different methods of data collection, however, may offer leads to instances where further investigation is necessary. The gathering of corroborated evidence from multiple sources and perspectives allows me to present stronger, more-authentic conclusions than I might have reached by using only one source of data.
Member-Checking

In terms of the authenticity of their conclusions, qualitative researchers may want extra, ongoing assurance that they have not misinterpreted the events that they have heard, observed, and recorded (Hays, 2004). Miles and Huberman (1994) state that a logical choice for validating or negating perceptions formed during qualitative data gathering or analysis is to return to the original participants and informants of the study. Researchers may periodically share their ongoing analyses or written reports with those that they have collected data from in order to check for content validation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe this process as member-checking and advocate using such techniques as a way to increase the trustworthiness of qualitative findings.

I used member-checking as a strategy to authenticate my analysis during several key moments of this research project. During my qualitative field experiences at Rexrode Elementary School, I consistently used my field notes to keep records of new questions to ask Ms. Pratt. These questions were added to both our informal discussions and formal interviews and they largely dealt with the clarification of analytical ideas I had formed during observations. I wanted to know if my ongoing analysis and interpretation of the multi-age structures and multi-age art teaching strategies at the selected observation site were accurate from the participant’s perspective. During a crucial stage of data analysis, I communicated with Alice Pratt through electronic mail and by telephone. I was seeking clarification and authentication of some of the analytically assumptions that emerged from my collected data. Such member-checking gave Ms. Pratt an opportunity to clarify, add feedback, or correct any misunderstandings that I may have made during the observations and interviews. Member-checking was just one of several strategies that I used to make sure that I had not misinterpreted the events and interviews that I had experienced as a researcher. As already described within my research overview, I conducted multiple interviews and observational sessions in order to check for consistency, and I used an audio recorder to accurately document the interviews in an attempt to achieve accuracy (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

The Researcher’s Presence and Perspective

It is a given that my presence as an observer in the selected multi-age art room altered classroom dynamics, particularly in the beginning stages of field research. Emerson et al. (1995) stated that a researcher’s presence at a fieldsite inescapably has some effect on those that are
studied; after all, the researcher is not invisible. To minimize the effect that my presence may have on the observed multi-age art classroom, I followed the recommendations of Bogdan and Biklen (2003) and scheduled repeated contacts at the fieldsite rather than one snapshot visit. Over time, the researcher’s aim is to have the subjects become accustomed to his or her presence and talk and act as they naturally do. Qualitative researchers should not present themselves to their informants as someone who knows it all or as someone who is expecting to see a specific positive or negative in certain situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Rather, researchers ideally present themselves as individuals who have come to learn, and more specifically to learn what experiences are like for a particular informant.

Because qualitative studies are filtered through researchers’ eyes, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that such researchers should be conscious of how their identities and past experiences may shape and enrich the subject matter of their studies. While the personal experiences of qualitative researchers inevitably have an effect on collected data, Eisner (1998a) asserted that this factor is actually an asset to qualitative research studies. Researchers who have experience and interest in education may have attuned sensibilities that allow them to make discriminating judgments as to the value of educational settings and teacher performance (Eisner, 1998a).

My perceptions of elementary art instruction have been formed by my own professional and personal experiences. From 1995 to 2003, I worked as a visual arts instructor at a public elementary school within the State of Florida. In this capacity, I taught art to as many as 700 students a week in grades one through five. During this time period, I was also fortunate enough to work occasionally as an educational consultant and presenter at school district workshops and conferences. Frequently, I was hired to speak on the subject of thematically integrated art projects. As was discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, it was during one of these educational conferences that I had my first formal introduction to multi-age education in the context of a professional development training session.

In August of 2003, I accepted a teaching assistant position with the Department of Art Education at a college within the State University System of Florida. This assistantship’s job description gave me the responsibilities of supervising student teachers from the Department of Art Education. My duties included the observation and evaluation of art education teacher-certification track students during their student teacher internships at both elementary and
secondary schools. During this time period, I also taught college-level courses that concentrated on classroom management in the art room and on the creation of professional teaching portfolios for art education students.

I believe that my professional experiences in art education have helped me in designing the content of the written survey and will help me in interpreting the results as well. My background in art education may have also helped me to relate to the art teacher who served as the primary informant of my study. My understanding of the context of elementary visual art instruction in the State of Florida may have enhanced my ability to be sensitive to the complexities of issues facing an art teacher as he or she goes about his or her daily practices. I paid specific attention to the qualities that characterized informants’ teaching in terms of practice, planning, organization of lessons, and perceived advantages and disadvantages in the context of working with multi-age groups of students.

It should also be mentioned that my wife has been employed as an elementary school teacher for 10 years. Approximately one year after I began researching and writing about multi-age education, a group of teachers at my wife’s school invited her to be a part of a multi-age team that they were forming. She accepted their offer and has just completed her second year working in that capacity at her school. (It should be briefly noted that my wife’s school was not involved in the data collection procedures of my study. The snowball sample revealed that the art teacher at her school was not eligible to participate in survey research or any other aspect of my inquiry.) Overall, my wife’s participation in a multi-age model of instruction has given me added insight into the inner workings of mixed-age classrooms and has contributed to my understanding of nongraded instruction as was initially formed through my review of literature on the subject.

My experiences as an art educator and as the husband of a multi-age educator may have helped me to understand and identify with the participants in this study and, in that sense, may have helped me to characterize situations from the participants’ perspective. That is not to say, however, that I do not have a personal perspective of my own. Qualitative researchers “should not attempt false value neutrality” (T. Anderson, 2000b, p. 82). Instead, qualitative researchers should clearly state their perspectives in order to guide their observations and analyses throughout the research project. By making their perspectives public, qualitative researchers also allow those reading their reports to know their orientations toward a research topic. This helps
the reader to make an assessment of the researchers’ findings based upon the perspectives that they have presented (T. Anderson, 2000b; Eisner, 1998a; Emerson et al., 1995).

I entered into this study with the personal point of view that elementary art instruction is a time-consuming, challenging, and intrinsically rewarding profession. However, I also understand that this point of view was shaped by my own experiences and that other art teachers may or may not share my perspective. Overall, I wondered how the daily practices of an elementary art instructor could be characterized in a multi-age model of classroom organization that differs from the traditional graded model of instruction.

I also entered into this study with the perspective that multi-age education appears to be a viable alternative to traditional graded models of schooling (B. Miller, 1990) for those who may be seeking a change in classroom organizational structures. My point of view, as shaped by the literature review, includes the notion that multi-age education may not be for everyone (Grant & Johnson, 1996) and I had not yet determined how multi-age education would or would not work for art teachers.

**Acknowledging Context and Providing Depth and Breadth**

Patton (1980) suggests that qualitative researchers can bolster the credibility of their findings by constantly keeping their data and subsequent findings in their proper contexts. Qualitative researchers often use purposive samples, or purposefully select a particular participant or participants based on unique criteria (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Considering the uniqueness of such participants, Patton maintains that qualitative researchers should remember to keep their findings within that unique context. The researcher should acknowledge this uniqueness, and reaffirm why he or she has made this selection. Choosing or identifying a significant situation or problem worthy of inquiry represents a crucial step in pragmatically grounded educational research (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Dewey, 1938).

In the case of my own research design, I acknowledge that I purposefully selected a single multi-age art program as a qualitative observation site. This selection was based on the degree of the program’s nongradedness, the presence of typical characteristics cited in multi-age literature within that program, and the willingness of the art teacher to participate in observations and interviews. If I truly wanted to explore the qualities that characterize art teaching within multi-age models of elementary instruction, it made the most sense to immerse myself in an environment where the model had been implemented to a greater degree, rather than a lesser.
This seemed to be particularly logical since a review of relevant literature revealed that multi-age art education had rarely been described within printed sources at all.

What effect, then, could this purposive selection have on my research in terms of keeping my findings within its given context as Patton (1980) suggests? Findings based only on the observation of a multi-age art teacher who works at a school that is completely multi-age, may or may not be representative of the experiences of art teachers who work at schools that contain just one or two multi-age classrooms mixed in with traditional graded models of instruction. It certainly is possible that such a selection may have overlooked potential problems that art teachers may face in locations where instructing a single multi-age class represents a major break in their regular graded schedules, practices, and routines.

While I must acknowledge the uniqueness of my selected observation site, I must also acknowledge that my research design does not rely on this observation alone. The initial data collected from the written surveys provides a contextual foundation for the study and reveals information about various types of nongraded elementary programs in Florida. The results of the survey, then, serve not only as a major informational component of this study but also help to offer a broader picture of multi-age art instruction, including some schools that contain both graded and nongraded models of instruction. While the observations and interviews explore an example of multi-age art instruction in depth, the surveys provide a picture of the situation in breadth. As such, the results of the survey allow me to offer some insight into the qualities that characterize art education in schools that contain both graded and muti-age programs, even if it is only to conclude that the situation deserves additional study. The use of survey research within the design of this study helps to bolster credibility through the breadth and contextual foundation that it provides.

**External Validity and Generalizability**

Patton’s (1980) discussion of context, in effect, introduces the related concepts and terms of external validity and generalizability. External validity refers to the degree in which the results of a particular research inquiry may be generalized from one context to other people or places beyond those directly investigated within the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). As a qualitative study that uses purposive, non-probability methods of data collection, this research project does not make formal inferences to a larger population. That is to say that inferential statistics are not used to make formal generalizations to all elementary level multi-age art
teachers, nor is it the purpose of this research project. However, that is not to say that the findings of the research project only apply to the multi-age art classrooms under investigation. Eisner (1998a) reminds researchers that generalizability is still possible in qualitative research through the natural transference of experiential learning from one situation to a recognizably similar one. In studies using inferential statistics, the researcher typically makes generalizations. In qualitative studies, naturalistic generalizations are more likely to be made by interested teachers and practitioners who work in similar situations to ones under investigation (Eisner, 1998a; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Those reading the finished report will play a role in judging whether the findings are applicable to their particular situations. In this respect, the possibility exists that the findings of this research project may hold implications for many multi-age art teachers, regardless of their schools’ degree of nongradeness. Furthermore the findings of this study could also hold implications for multi-age music educators, multi-age physical education instructors, and many others working in similar situations.

Summary

This research study used qualitative research methods within a pragmatic theoretical framework to explore selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction. The specific instruments of data collection that were used in this study included written surveys, observations, and interviews. The review of related literature on multi-age art education presented in the previous chapter was a useful tool for developing research questions appropriate for the purposes of this study. Primarily, I was interested in investigating the qualities that characterize visual art teaching in selected public school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction. Based on these findings, suggestions are made for structuring and implementing multi-age art education at the elementary level.

As suggested by the themes within the literature review, I was also interested in a series of supporting questions that explore who the multi-age art teachers really are and how multi-age models of art education are structured within public elementary schools. I was curious to find what the advantages and disadvantages are for art teachers working in multi-age learning environments, and I wondered how the purposes of art teachers and homeroom teachers engaged in multi-age education might support or conflict with one another. Overall, I wanted to know what the implications are for the implementation of multi-age models of elementary instruction.
in the art classroom and for art educators.

This research study was conducted in a number of phases and steps. The first phase, a critical review of the existing literature on multi-age art education, was presented in Chapter 2 in order to create a foundation or framework for the study. Existing literature on qualitative research methods was also critically reviewed in order to formulate a workable research strategy. Snowball sampling techniques were used to identify 69 multi-age art teachers working in public elementary schools within the State of Florida who were eligible to receive written surveys on the practices and perceptions of multi-age art educators. The results of these surveys provided broad contextual information on multi-age art education and were also used to select one multi-age art teacher to participate in qualitative examinations. I interacted with and observed the selected art teacher, referred to Alice Pratt, as she delivered instruction to her mixed age group of students for over 25 hours until I reached a saturation point in my data collection. I also conducted three qualitative interviews with Ms. Pratt that followed a pattern of questions based on focused life history, the details of experience, and reflections on meaning. The data collected from the surveys, observations, and interviews has undergone careful coding, content analysis, and structural corroboration before findings could be presented in the form of qualitative narratives and descriptive statistics. These findings, as well as the analysis of the collected data, will be explored further in the next three chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR:
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF COLLECTED SURVEY DATA

This chapter begins to reveal the qualities that characterize visual art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts from the State of Florida. The findings presented in this chapter have been obtained by using the data collection techniques of survey research. Other qualitative data was collected through observation and interview, but the analysis of that data will be presented in Chapter 5. While the specific methods used to collect and analyze the survey data were presented in great detail in Chapter 3, I will briefly summarize them here in the introduction of this chapter as well. I used a snowball sampling technique that located 69 multi-age art teachers who worked in public elementary schools in the State of Florida during the 2005 – 2006 school year. The 69 multi-age art educators were each mailed a written survey that was designed to collect contextual information on the background of these teachers, their multi-age teaching practices, and their perceptions of nongraded art instruction. After two reminder notices, 36 completed surveys were returned for a 52.17% response rate.

The results of the close-ended survey questions were carefully analyzed, counted, and tabulated before being transferred into percentages, frequency tables, or bar graphs through the use of such computer software as the statistical program for social science, SPSS. The results of the open-ended survey questions went through careful content analysis, pre-figured coding, and open coding (Emerson et al, 1995) before being translated into descriptive statistics, tables, or graphs. The results of all sources, including the data collected during qualitative fieldwork, were compared and structurally corroborated (Eisner, 1998a) during the concluding phases of analysis.

The findings gathered from the different data collection sources will be presented over the course of this chapter and the two following chapters. This chapter, then, presents the amalgamated, contextual findings provided by the group of multi-age art teachers who returned completed surveys. The findings of the naturalistic observations and interviews will be combined in the form of qualitative narratives in the next chapter. Due to the use of structural corroboration between all sources, the findings will often overlap, particularly in Chapter 5 and
Chapter 6. This chapter will primarily focus on the results of survey research alone, as it establishes the foundation for the rest of the study.

As described in Chapter 3, the survey sent to the identified multi-age art teachers consisted of 20 items. The first 11 items were close-ended questions that asked the multi-age art teachers to describe their background in terms of instructional experience, experience teaching to multi-age groups, and the conditions under which they deliver multi-age art instruction. The second part included nine questions related to the perceptions and opinions of the multi-age art teachers. Seven of those nine questions were at least partially open-ended in nature. The first and last questions of the survey will not be discussed in great detail in this section of the research report. The first survey question asked, “Are you currently teaching art to at least one class organized as a multi-age group?” The results of this question have already been presented in Chapter 3 as it related to the reduction of possible participants from a total of 71 to 69 potential respondents. The last survey question asked, “If contacted, would you be willing to allow the researcher to interview you and observe your multi-age teaching practices?” The results of this particular question pertained to the selection of a multi-age art classroom to be used in naturalistic observations and were also discussed in Chapter 3.

The analysis of the remaining 18 items will not be presented in the order that they appeared on the survey. Instead the analysis of questionnaire items has been grouped into categories of similar theme in order to make the presentation of findings more coherent. The clusters of themes that will be discussed in this chapter include (a) the organizational structure and characteristics of the multi-age art classes and schools, (b) the background of the multi-age art teachers, (c) the practice of multi-age art instruction, (d) the compatibility between the philosophies of art teachers and the philosophies of multi-age education, (e) the perceptions of multi-age art teachers, and (f) a closer look at the data through the use of crossbreak tables. Within these themes, the results of the survey questions will also be arranged in an order to make for clear and logical analysis.

**Structure of Multi-age Art Classes and Schools**

The first theme that is addressed in my analysis of survey research deals directly with the organizational structure of multi-age classes and schools and how this structure may or may not impact the surveyed art teachers. The survey questions that will be examined in this section
include questions number 2, 3, 4, 9, and 10. Question 2 asked the multi-age art teachers, “Do you work at a school site that consists entirely of multi-age classrooms or are only some of the classes multi-age in configuration?” The question was close-ended in nature and the purpose was to discover the extent to which art teachers were consistently instructing to multi-age groups within a school day or school week. The snowball sampling procedure and review of literature had revealed that some schools contained only one or two multi-age classrooms mixed in with traditional graded models of instruction, while other schools were described as completely multi-age in organization (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). I was curious to find out how many respondents were constantly switching back and forth from graded to nongraded art classes during their weekly schedules.

Figure 2 shows the frequency of responses to this question. Out of the 36 respondents, 28 art teachers (77.78%) reported that they were currently working at school sites that were only partially multi-age in configuration. A much smaller number of respondents, 8 art teachers (22.22%), reported that they were working at schools that were entirely multi-age in structure.

![Figure 2. Degree of nongradedness present at each art teacher’s school site](image)

Figure 2. Degree of nongradedness present at each art teacher’s school site
Questionnaire item 3 asked respondents, “How many multi-age classes do you teach art to during this school year?” Since the possibility existed that some schools were only partially multi-age in configuration, I wanted to specifically know how many nongraded classes existed at each school site. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics that resulted from this question. Of the 36 respondents, 5 art teachers either did not answer this question or provided an answer that was not calculable. The results of the 31 respondents who did provide a calculable answer show that the mean score of the number of multi-age art classes at these school sites was 14.74. The lowest number of scheduled multi-age art classes was reported by a respondent who only taught one multi-age class during the school year. The highest number of multi-age art classes was reported by a respondent who taught art to 35 nongraded classes during the school year.

Table 2.
Number of Multi-age Classes Taught During School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Response or Incalculable Responses</th>
<th>Valid Response (N)</th>
<th>Minimum Number of Multi-age Classes</th>
<th>Maximum Number of Multi-age Classes</th>
<th>Mean Score (M)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 4 asked the multi-age art teachers, “What grade levels have been combined in the multi-age classes that you teach?” The purpose of the question was to determine the grade spans typically combined within multi-age art classes, as well as the frequency with which these combinations occurred for the 36 respondents. The question was close-ended in nature and the descriptive results can be found in Table 3. The most frequently combined grades were third/fourth/fifth grade configurations, as well as kindergarten/first grade configurations. Both cases were each reported by 16 of the 36 respondents (44.44%). The next most frequently grouped grade levels were first/second (reported by 41.66% of respondents), followed by fourth/fifth (36.11%), third/fourth (27.77%), kindergarten/first/second (25%), and second/third (19.44%). There were also 5 respondents (13.8%) that reported multi-age configurations
consisting of students in exceptional student education (ESE) programs or individualized education programs (IEP). Students in ESE or IEP programs receive specialized services or accommodations due to the presence of learning disabilities, giftedness, or other varying exceptionalities (Florida Department of Education, 2005; SchwabLearning.Org, 2006). One response each was received for multi-age groupings of pre-kindergarten students, pre-kindergarten/first, first/second/third/fourth, and kindergarten/first/second/third/fourth/fifth grade level combinations. One of the surveyed multi-age art teachers did not respond to this question. Overall the results show that most of the multi-age art groupings consisted of combinations of two or three consecutive grade levels. Of the 96 responses offered by the surveyed art teachers, 87 (90%) indicated a multi-age grouping of such two or three grade level combinations. The single responses that indicated a first - fourth grade combination as well as a kindergarten - fifth grade combination seem to be rare anomalies. The respondent that reported the kindergarten - fifth grade grouping did not list any other multi-age configurations at his or her school site. The possibility exists that this respondent misinterpreted the question and may have responded with all of the grade levels that were, in total, involved in multi-age groupings at his or her school site.

Question 9 of the mailed survey asked, “What is the approximate number of students in your multi-age art classes?” The purpose of the question was to obtain descriptive information about the size of multi-age groupings in art. Considering the use of flexible grouping strategies by nongraded teams, I was curious to see if there was something unique about multi-age groupings that resulted in unusually large or small art classes. The question was close-ended in nature and the results can be found in Table 4. I will briefly note that 11 of the 36 respondents selected more than one answer for this question. Some of the art teachers explained that they were attempting to show the differences in size between their primary and intermediate multi-age classes. Others noted that there were size differences between most of their multi-age classes and those multi-age classes that contained ESE or IEP students. Some respondents explained that the multi-age classes that were team-taught tended to be much larger. Others did not explain why they selected more than one answer. In total, I tallied 51 different responses to question nine.
Table 3.
Frequency Distribution: Traditional Grade Levels Combined in Multi-age Art Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Levels Combined</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre K</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre K - K</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K – 1st</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K, 1st, 2nd</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st – 2nd</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd – 3rd</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd – 4th</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd, 4th, 5th</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th - 5th</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st – 4th</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-5th</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESE or IEP Combination</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* K= kindergarten; ESE = exceptional student education; IEP = individualized education program.

Of the 36 respondents, I tabulated 26 art teachers (72.22%) that reported that the multi-age art classes usually had between 21 and 25 students. The next most frequent responses referred to classes that had between 26 and 30 students (reported by 30.55% of respondents), and 15 to 20 students (19.44% of respondents). It seemed rare for the multi-age classes to be either unusually small or large. Only 2 respondents mentioned classes of less than 15 students, and only 1 respondent mentioned a class of 36 or more students.
Table 4. 
*Frequency Distribution: Approximate Number of Students in Multi-age Art Classes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less Than 15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>72.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 or More</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* 11 of the 36 art teachers provided multiple responses, resulting in a total of 51 charted answers.

Question 10 inquired further about the organizational structure of the multi-age classes: “Are the multi-age classes at your school taught by a single homeroom teacher or by a group of team teachers?” The literature review had revealed the possibility of a team-taught approach to multi-age instruction (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Chase & Doan, 1994; Cushman, 1993; McCarthey et al, 1996; Miletta, 1996) and I wondered to what extent such an approach impacted the 36 art teachers who returned surveys. The question was close-ended in nature with the results being displayed in Figure 3. The final tabulations show that 21 of the 36 art teachers (58.33%) delivered art instruction to multi-age classes that were taught by teams of teachers. Only 5 of the art teachers (13.89%) worked in schools that only featured single homeroom teachers to oversee each multi-age class. There were, however, 10 more art teachers (27.78%) who reported that they worked at school sites that had both multi-age classes led by teams of teachers and by single homeroom teachers.
In a related follow up question, I explored the possible impact of team-teaching on nongraded art teachers by asking, “If the multi-age classes are taught by a team of teachers, do they reorganize or regroup their classroom art rosters throughout the year?” The review of literature had revealed that team teachers of multi-age classes often utilize more than one classroom space, which allows the students to be flexibly grouped and regrouped from instructor to instructor or classroom to classroom in order to meet each individual child’s changing developmental needs (Cushman, 1993). I wanted to know if this flexible regrouping of students from teacher to teacher within team-taught models of multi-age instruction ever resulted in changes in the art teachers’ class rosters. Could the use of flexible regrouping by teams of teachers cause inconsistencies in the make-up of art teachers’ multi-age classes, perhaps even in the middle of an ongoing art project?

The results of this question can be found in Figure 4. Before describing the results, I will first note that one respondent answered this question twice in order to reflect the differences between the two multi-age schools that he or she worked at as an itinerant art instructor that split time between two schools during a work week. Considering this double response, 32 total
answers were given that addressed the issue of regrouped art rosters. I purposefully included the five art teachers who did not deal with team-taught multi-age classes within the bar graph of Figure 4 in order to present a holistic view of the issue. Almost half of the 37 responses, or 48.65%, indicate that the flexible regrouping of students from homeroom teacher to homeroom teacher in team taught multi-age configurations resulted in inconsistent classroom rosters for the surveyed multi-age art teachers. The issue of team teaching and flexible regrouping will be explored and readdressed at later points in analysis and conclusions.

Figure 4. Do teams of multi-age teachers reorganize or regroup their classroom art rosters throughout the course of a school year?

Multi-age Art Teachers and Their Background

Having explored the survey items that related to the organizational structure of the multi-age groups, schools, and art classes of the surveyed participants, I will now turn my attention to these participants, themselves, and their background. The survey items that will be examined in this section include questionnaire items 5, 6, 7, 8, and 18. Question number 6 asked the
respondents, “How many total years of teaching experience do you have?” Because I am interested in learning who these multi-age art teachers are, I was compelled to find out if the surveyed art teachers were more likely to be newer teachers, veterans with years of experience, or somewhere in between. The nature of the question was close-ended and the results have been depicted in Figure 5.

The largest number of respondents (41.67%) indicated that they had 16 years or more of overall professional teaching experience. In contrast to these veteran teachers, the second most frequent category in years of teaching experience came from those respondents who had taught for 1 to 5 years (30.56%). This response was followed in frequency by those who reported 11 to 15 years of teaching experience (16.67%), and then those who had 6 to 10 years of experience (11.11%). At first glance, it may appear as if the surveyed multi-age art teachers were more likely to be experienced veterans. A closer look at the bar graph in Figure 5 shows that this assumption does not pan out in a typical skewed pattern. In fact, the 15 veteran teachers on one end of the bar graph are almost balanced by the 11 newer teachers on the opposite end of the graph. The overall results seem to be far more random, rather than holding to a specific ascending or descending pattern.

Question number 5, expanded on my inquiry into the professional experiences of the surveyed multi-age art educators. In this instance I asked, “Have you taught multi-age classes in the past?” I wondered if the respondents, regardless of their overall years of teaching experience, were new to the practice of nongraded art instruction. As shown in Figure 6, 30 of the 36 art teachers (83.33%) did indeed have some multi-age teaching experience in the past. In comparison to the 30 art teachers who did have multi-age teaching experience, only 6 respondents (16.67%) had not completed a full year of mixed-age art instruction at the time the survey was administered and completed.
Figure 5. Total years of teaching experience

Figure 6. Respondents with multi-age teaching experience
I included a follow up question that asked respondents to provide further information as to the general number of years that they have been involved in multi-age art education. In order to represent the respondents holistically, I included the 6 art teachers who were still completing their first year of multi-age art instruction in a bar graph that depicts the overall results (see Figure 7). Of the total 36 respondents, 10 art teachers (27.78%) reported that they had 10 or more years of multi-age teaching experience. The next most frequent responses belonged to both the 8 art teachers (22.22%) that indicated that they had 1 to 3 years of multi-age experience, and to 8 more art teachers (22.22%) that indicated 7 to 9 years of multi-age experience. There were 4 more respondents (11.11%) who reported that they had taught art to mixed-age groups for 4 to 6 years. The overall results show the respondents to have a wide variety in their range of professional familiarity with nongraded art instruction. It does not appear as if, in terms of multi-age experience, that there was just one type of art teacher who was more likely to be involved in multi-age education or to return a completed survey. The results also indicate that the overall survey data includes the perspectives of those with many years of multi-age experience and those who are relatively new to the teaching structure.

![Figure 7. Respondents’ years of multi-age teaching experience](image-url)
In order to collect further descriptive information on the surveyed multi-age art teachers, questionnaire item number 7 was designed to ask, “Where do you teach art?” More specifically, I wanted to know if each responding art teacher taught in his or her own art classroom, a portable classroom unit, traveled from homeroom to homeroom, or delivered art instruction from some other location in some other manner. In response to this question, six informants marked more than one answer and explained that the location from which they deliver art instruction varies from time to time and location to location. Some of these respondents explained that they are itinerant art teachers who work at more than one school site. While one school may have provided an itinerant teacher with a portable classroom unit, the other school may have asked him or her to travel from homeroom to homeroom and so on. The multiple responses from these six art teachers provided variations, permutations, and combinations that I had not expected in response to this question. The overall results are shown in Table 5. The majority of the multi-age art teachers (61.11%) reported that they instructed mixed-age groups in their own art classroom. The next highest frequency was indicated by a group of five art teachers (13.88%) who traveled from homeroom to homeroom in order to teach art. There were three more art teachers (8.33%) who taught multi-age classes strictly within portable classroom units. The remainder of the statistics represents the responses of those art teachers who delivered art from more than one location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own Art Classroom</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>61.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travels to Homerooms</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portable Unit</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom and Portable</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom, Portable, and Travels to Homerooms</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom and Travels to Homerooms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portable and Travels to Homerooms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.
*Frequency Distribution: Location or Venue of Multi-age Art Instruction*
Survey question 8 asked, “Were you given a choice as to whether you were willing to service students in multi-age groupings or was the model of organization assigned to you?” The literature review revealed that nongraded instruction might not be suited for all teachers (Grant & Johnson, 1996). Considering this, recommendations had been made that the mandating of multi-age education should be prohibited; the model of instruction should not be forced on those who are not inclined or suited to try this alternative method of elementary school organization (Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Otto, 1969). With this recommendation in mind, I couldn’t help but wonder if art teachers at multi-age school sites had been asked to participate in such programs, or if their involvement had been mandated. I found this question even more intriguing when I learned that the results of question two (see Figure 2) showed that most of the surveyed multi-age art teachers (77.78%) were working at school sites that were not entirely multi-age in configuration. Schools that have both traditional graded structures and multi-age groupings could be the result of interested groups of teachers who have formed multi-age classrooms within existing schools as an add-on option (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Art teachers already working at such multi-age add-on schools may not have anticipated the creation of and arrival of multi-age groupings of students within their work environment. If unexpected add-ons were formed, were the art teachers consulted as to whether or not they were willing to accept such mixed-age groups in their art classrooms? Overall, did art teachers have a sense of professional autonomy (Forsyth & Danisiewicz, 1985) in regard to participating in multi-age models of education?

The results of the survey question related to professional autonomy and the art teachers’ level of choice in participating in multi-age education are displayed in Figure 8. Of the 36 respondents, 34 art teachers (94.44%) reported that multi-age groupings had been assigned to them. One single respondent (2.78%) reported that he or she had been given a choice to accept mixed-age groups in his or her art classroom and also indicated that this choice was presented “upon interview” for employment. The respondent further clarified that he or she was unaware of the possibility of having mixed-age groups in the art room and “did not know [about it] until [the] interview.” One other single respondent (2.78%) implied that he or she was given a choice about multi-age groupings on a case-by-case basis, and that “sometimes administration will solicit input.” This particular respondent was also one of the art teachers that reported having multi-age groups consisting of ESE and IEP students. It is possible that the case-by-case consultations may have occurred in regard to mixing students of differing and varying
exceptionalities, such as the multi-age mix of gifted and autistic students indicated on this art teacher’s completed survey.

It is also possible that the lack of professional autonomy provided to the surveyed art teachers could help to explain their diverse and seemingly random backgrounds. Since the art teachers were not asked if they were willing to accept mixed-age groupings, it stands to reason that they may not share much in common in terms of years of experience and other characteristics discussed later in analysis. Their participation in multi-age art education seems not to be guided so much by choice, but rather by circumstance. It is possible that the most common characteristic shared by 34 of the 36 surveyed art teachers is that they happened to be working at a school site or were offered a job at a school site that had implemented or was planning to implement multi-age classrooms on some level. The further implications of the lack of professional autonomy offered to these multi-age art teachers will be discussed in greater detail throughout this research report.

Figure 8. Professional autonomy involved in art teachers’ entry into multi-age instruction
Although 34 of the 36 respondents reported that they felt that multi-age groupings were assigned to them, these responses do not fully explain how aware the art teachers may have been of the changes in organizational structure that were in store for them. A follow up question asked, “If you were assigned multi-age art classes, did this assignment occur because you willingly applied for a job at a school site where you knew that multi-age classes existed or was the assignment unexpected?” I wanted to know if any of the surveyed art teachers were at least aware of the implementation of multi-age classes from the beginning, or if the assignment came about in a completely unexpected fashion. The results of this follow up question are depicted in Figure 9. Of the 34 respondents who had indicated that multi-age groupings were assigned to them, 19 art teachers (55.88%) reported that they willingly applied to a school site where they knew that multi-age classes already existed. While they felt that they hadn’t been given a choice, they were at least aware of the situation that they would be entering as professionals. In contrast, 14 of the 34 art teachers (41.18%) indicated that their assignment to multi-age art education was unexpected. A single art teacher (2.94%) reported that his or her work site began as an inclusion model school that eventually developed into complete multi-age configurations. An inclusive school setting is one that focuses on the mainstreaming, rather than separating, of disabled students into the school community and traditional classroom settings (Children & Young People’s Services, n.d.).

Questionnaire item 18 further explored the background and experiences of the surveyed multi-age art educators by asking, “Have you participated in any professional development workshops or trainings that you feel have helped you in teaching art to multi-age classes?” Teachers working in nongraded learning environments require staff development training and access to multi-age research in order to prepare for mixed age groupings in their own classrooms (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 1991; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). I wanted to know if the surveyed art teachers had received any such useful training. The nature of the question was close-ended and the results can be found in Figure 10. The majority of the respondents (52.78%) indicated that they had not participated in any trainings or workshops that seemed helpful to their multi-age art instruction, while 41.67% of the art teachers indicated that they had participated in useful trainings. There were two art teachers (5.56%) that did not respond to the question.
Figure 9. Nature of art teachers’ assignment to multi-age configurations

Figure 10. Art teachers’ participation in training helpful to multi-age art instruction.
A related question asked the art teachers who had participated in useful training to list the experiences that they felt were helpful. The 15 art teachers gave, in total, 20 responses that were grouped into the 13 categories displayed in Table 6. The general content of these trainings seems to be just as relevant as the frequency with which each response occurred. Of the 36 surveyed art teachers, only 3 (8.33%) referred directly to having attended training specifically designed on the subject of multi-age education. One of these teachers indicated that he or she had actually helped to write, develop, and implement a three-day multi-age training workshop for art, music, and physical education instructors. There were four other respondents that mentioned attending training with content that seemed to have strong connections to multi-age instruction, particularly in the advocacy of scaffolding techniques and working with students of differing developmental and ability levels. These responses came from two informants who mentioned attending cooperative learning (Wong & Wong, 1998) workshops, one who mentioned a training on the subject of leveled instruction in the gifted classroom, and one more who mentioned a differentiated instruction training (Tomlinson, 2001).

In the arena of art education, two respondents mentioned that they had found their own professional and pre-professional experiences, rather than specific workshops, to have been valuable in preparing for multi-age art instruction. In one of these cases, the respondent referred to her student teaching internship at a multi-age school site. In the other case, the respondent referred to her past experiences teaching art at the secondary level: “Having taught high school for so many years, I am familiar with multi-age because that is how students are scheduled for art in the upper levels.” Kasten and Clarke (1993) noted how the past experiences of special area teachers, such as work at summer programs or after school programs, can often be used as useful experiential touchstones when preparing art, music, or physical education teachers for multi-age instruction.

There were eight more respondents who directly referred to trainings and workshops that they felt were helpful in teaching art to multi-age classes, yet the content of these workshops seemed to have looser connections to nongraded instruction then some of the previous examples. These workshops included literacy training (two responses), math science institutes (one response), classroom management (two responses), English for Speakers of Other Languages (one response), professional learning communities (one response), and art education trainings where colleagues share lesson plans (one response). While there is no reason to question the
usefulness of such trainings, the content of such workshops does not necessarily seem to have specific and strong connections to multi-age art education. Additionally, 1 of the 15 art teachers who had reported that he or she had participated in trainings relevant to multi-age art education, did not list the specific trainings that he or she had attended and was tabulated as “no response.” Another art teacher provided only a three-word response: “All of them.”

Table 6.
Frequency Distribution: Helpful Workshops/Experiences as Reported Relevant by Multi-age Art Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Training</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-age Training (Gives or Has Taken)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experience (Student Teaching/High School)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Education In-Service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Instruction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveled Instruction in Gifted Classrooms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Science Institute</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“All of Them”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages. The results show responses from the 15 art teachers who reported attending trainings helpful to their multi-age art instruction. Some informants reported more than one answer.
In summary, the surveyed multi-age art teachers were diverse in their years of overall teaching experience and multi-age teaching experience. Only 6 of the 36 respondents (16.67%) were still completing their first year of multi-age instructional service. Most multi-age art teachers delivered instruction in their own art rooms, but some worked in portable units, traveled from homeroom to homeroom, or some combination of all options. Overwhelmingly, the multi-age art teachers (94.44%) reported that they had not been given a choice as to whether or not they were willing to accept mixed-age groups in their classrooms and felt as if they had been assigned the model of instruction. The lack of professional autonomy involved in this assignment may explain the overall diversity in the art teachers’ years of experience as well as other factors to be explored later in analysis. For lack of a better term, the art teachers represent a sort of random sample since they did not play much of a role in the decision to teach art to multi-age groups. Most of the art teachers (52.78%) reported that they have not participated in teacher training that was useful to their multi-age teaching practices. Of the 15 art teachers who did report taking part in useful training, only 3 actually mentioned participating in training specifically designed on the subject of multi-age education.

**Instructional Practice**

The next theme that I will address in the analysis of survey research deals with the resources, methods, and overall instructional practices of the multi-age art teachers. The survey questions that will be explored in this section include items 11, 12, and 15. Question number 11 asked, “What resources do you use frequently when instructing multi-age classes?” The query was close-ended in nature and provided the respondents with choices that they could select, with an additional option to write-in other resources. The results of the art teachers’ responses can be found in Table 7. The most frequent response was “classroom space that allows for grouping of students” which was reported by 30 art teachers (83.33%). The use of such grouping strategies is recommended in multi-age literature (Cushman, 1993) in order to allow for peer assistance, peer tutoring, cooperative learning and other scaffolding techniques. Allowing students to interact with one another is a typical strategy in art classrooms (Eisner, 2002) and many elementary art teachers seat their students at large tables so that they can share supplies and converse with one another about their work. In this sense, the typical art classroom may be more suited for the socialization recommended by multi-age advocates in comparison to homeroom classes that
feature traditional rows of individual isolated desks. Of the six art teachers who did not report using their classroom space for student groupings, one did not have their own classroom space to utilize since he or she spent his or her school days traveling from classroom to classroom to teach art.

The next most frequently reported resource was audiovisual equipment (reported by 52.77% of respondents) followed by teachers’ manuals or texts written by grade level (reported by 11 respondents). Multi-age literature suggests that graded textbooks should only be used as references and only a few copies should be allowed since grade level distinctions are not to be made in multi-age classrooms (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). However, the data from the surveys is not clear on whether or not the art teachers were using the textbooks as a reference or as a sequential, lock-step curriculum.

The next most frequently reported resources included learning centers (seven responses), personal computers (four responses), and individually separated desks (four responses). Although the use of individually separated desks does not seem to provide an atmosphere that is conducive to the scaffolding techniques advocated by the philosophies of multi-age education, I will briefly note that two of the four art teachers who reported using this resource do not actually have their own art classrooms. These two teachers consistently travel from classroom to classroom in order to deliver art instruction, so it remains unclear who is responsible for the physical seating arrangement of desks when the art teacher arrives. In either case, the situation certainly might seem out of sync with the recommendations of multi-age literature (Cushman, 1993; Hallion, 1994). Another one of the art teachers who reported using individually separated desks worked with many multi-age groups consisting of autistic students and other ESE students.

Other reported resources used by the multi-age art teachers included modeling and demonstration (two responses), visual aids (two responses), and a SMART Board (one response). One other art teacher was charted as reporting that “nothing special” was used as a resource in instructing multi-age art classes. To be more specific, this respondent stated, “All art classes are designed for many levels of art talent [emphasis respondent] which has nothing to do with age – so nothing special occurs for a multi-age group.” In some ways, this sentiment is also implied in multi-age literature that suggests that teaching in a multi-age classroom is not all that different from effective instruction in any classroom (Hunter, 1992), where most assuredly developmentally differences also exist.
A similar question asked the respondents to switch their attention from teaching resources to teaching methods. Question number 15 asked, “Which, if any, of the following instructional methods have you found to be effective in teaching art to multi-age classes?” Once again, the question was close-ended in nature, but allowed the informants an opportunity to write-in additional answers and instructional methods. As illustrated in Table 8, the top five most frequent responses in this case are all instructional methods advocated and emphasized in multi-age literature. The most frequent response was provided by 28 multi-age art educators (77.77%) who reported the use of cooperative learning groups, followed by 25 respondents (69.44%) who indicated the use of peer tutoring or peer assistance. Theme-based instruction was the next most frequently mentioned method (reported by 47.22% of respondents), while 16 informants (44.44%) indicated an integrative curriculum as an effective method for nongraded art instruction. Six more art teachers (16.66%) also reported the effective use of team teaching strategies. Single responses rounded out the answers in this grouping with the use of long term
goals, state guidelines, high level thinking skills, prior knowledge of students’ developmental levels, and similar methods as those used in graded instruction all receiving one response apiece. In the later case, a familiar sentiment is expressed by a different respondent who states: “I really think I teach the same as I would a straight grade level class as I would a multi-age class. Because no matter what, both kinds of classes have high and low students. So you use the high students to help the low students.” One other respondent added an instructional method described by just four words: “Never sitting down. Ever.”

Table 8.
Frequency Distribution: Instructional Methods Used by Multi-age Art Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Method</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning Groups</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>77.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Tutoring or Assistance</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>69.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme-Based Instruction</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Curriculum</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Teaching</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Long Term Goals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Guidelines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporation of High Level Thinking Skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Prior Knowledge of Students’ Developmental Levels As A Guide</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses Same Methods as for Graded Classrooms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Never Sitting Down”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Literature on multi-age instruction advocated the use of broad based conceptual or thematic inquiry units that could be integrated across subject areas (Lolli, 1998). Since Kasten and Clarke (1993) suggested that art, music, and physical education instructors could integrate
such themes into their own curricula, I wanted to know if the surveyed art teachers participated in or advocated such thematic integration. The results of question 15 (see Table 8) have already shown that 47.22% of the art teachers found the use of theme-based instruction effective and that 44.44% of the respondents found an integrative curriculum to be useful to teaching multi-age groups as well. However, those results don’t necessarily indicate whether or not the art teachers were creating their own thematic units or were connecting with themes created by multi-age homeroom teachers. Furthermore, the use of an integrative approach to curricula could focus on the incorporation of subject area skills (such as multiplication, division, or essay writing), rather than the incorporation of art instruction within the framework of a broad based thematic unit.

In order to find out if multi-age art educators were utilizing thematic integration in their instructional practices, I had to first find out if the multi-age homeroom teachers were indeed using theme-based units in the first place. With this in mind, question 12 first asked, “Do any of the multi-age homeroom teachers at your school use theme-based units to deliver instruction to their students?” The question was close-ended in nature and the results can be found in Figure 11. In response, 31 of the 36 art teachers (86.11%) reported that the homeroom teachers at their multi-age school site did, in fact, use broad based thematic units with their students. Only a single respondent reported that homeroom teachers did not use thematic units; 4 other teachers (11.11%) indicated that they did not know whether or not thematic instruction was utilized.

The follow-up inquiry on the subject of thematic instruction then stated, “If you answered yes, please describe your opinion or stance on tying your art curriculum in with the themes being used in the multi-age homerooms.” This question was open-ended in nature, so I reviewed the answers several times before assigning both prefigured and emergent codes (Eisner, 1998a). The three codes that were applied to the answers included (a) generally favorable, (b) uses with ambivalence, and (c) negative stance. The following statement provides an example of a response that was coded as generally favorable: “Love it! Students bring knowledge with them to art and, hopefully, back to the classroom.” Responses that were coded as uses with ambivalence would include this sample statement: “It is okay, can be a plus as long as my instructional focus hits the ‘meat’ of being an artist [emphasis respondent].” A sample statement that was coded as negative stance is provided in the following survey response: “I think it is totally ridiculous. It would be just as appropriate to ask basic education teachers to gear their math instruction to what I’m teaching in art.”
The results of this open-ended question can be found in Figure 12. Of the 31 respondents who reported that the multi-age homeroom teachers utilized thematic instruction, 14 art teachers (45.16%) indicated that they made curricular connections to these themes with some ambivalence. In these cases, the use of thematic connections usually depended on “when the themes [were] easily compatible” with concepts the art teacher had intended to cover in the subject area of the visual arts. Another 12 art teachers (38.71%) were generally favorable about the use of thematic integration and spoke of the teaching strategy with more enthusiasm. There were 5 (16.13%) of the 31 respondents who had an overall negative stance toward thematic integration and preferred not to make such connections in their art curriculum if possible. The results show, in total, that 26 (72.22%) of the original 36 respondents used thematic integration at times, and that this use was met with varying levels of enthusiasm.
An overview of the surveyed multi-age art educators’ instructional practices reveals that the resources used most often by the majority of respondents included classroom space that allows for the grouping of students (83.33% of respondents) and audio visual equipment (52.77%). The majority of surveyed art teachers also found the use of cooperative learning groups (77.77%), and peer assistance (69.44%) to be effective methods in multi-age art instruction. Additionally, 72.22% of the multi-age art teachers used thematic integration from time-to-time, typically when the connections between multi-age homeroom themes and the nature of visual arts education appeared to be strong. While many of the respondents reported the use of thematic integration in their arts curriculum, they also reported this use with varying levels of enthusiasm.

**Compatibility of Purpose and Philosophy**

My thematic analysis of the collected surveys will now turn its attention from the practices of multi-age art educators to their purposes. I am interested to know how the purposes
and philosophies of the surveyed art teachers might support or conflict with the general philosophies of multi-age education. A reasonable starting point in this inquiry was to ascertain the personal philosophies of art education as held by the various respondents. Specifically, question 16 asked the art teachers to “briefly describe your personal philosophy or theoretical orientation toward art education i.e., studio based, DBAE or other content based art education, creative self expression, etc.” The question was open-ended in nature and, as such, I approached the answers with a coding strategy that began with prefigured foci (Eisner, 1998a) before switching to an emergent or open coding process (Emerson et al., 1995). My prefigured codes were based on many of the prevailing philosophies and approaches to art education as identified by Eisner (2002). These codes included the visions and versions of art education known as discipline-based art education, creative self-expression, integrated arts, and visual culture art education.

In brief and general terms, discipline based art education (DBAE) focuses not just on the creation of student artwork, but on the understanding of works of art themselves through the use of four specific disciplines (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Eisner, 2002). The four disciplines used to understand works of art include art history, art criticism, aesthetics, and art production. The vision of art education known as creative self-expression, on the other hand, focuses primarily on art production and allowing children to freely express themselves through the open exploration of art tools, techniques and concepts (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Eisner, 2002). An integrated arts approach is one that seeks to make curricular connections between the visual arts, other subject areas, and even other art forms (Eisner, 2002). The approach often emphasizes connections to particular historical periods, open-ended themes, problem solving activities, or other arts such as music, dance, or drama. Visual culture art education centers on the search for meaning embedded within all sorts of artifacts found not just in the realm of the fine arts, but also in popular media, advertising, technological creations, retail stores, the internet, parks, and the every day visual world that surrounds us all (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Eisner, 2002). Exploring visual culture helps students to grasp the meanings embedded within such artifacts and helps them to deconstruct the purposes, attitudes, beliefs, and culture of those who have made such visual items and representations.

With these codes in hand, and an eye for emerging foci, I began to analyze the answers reported by the multi-age art teachers in response to question 16. While I anticipated that many
art teachers would actually subscribe to some combination of these philosophies (Eisner, 2002). I was not prepared for the immense volume of philosophical permutations that the data produced. Table 9 introduces the 19 different answers and combinations that resulted from the coding process. Of the 36 respondents, 11 (30.55%) described a philosophical orientation that combined elements of DBAE and creative self-expression. There were also 7 (19.44%) respondents who stated philosophies that were aligned solely with the concepts of creative self-expression. If the codes were treated independently, rather than in combinations, creative self-expression was coded most often (25 occurrences) and DBAE was the next most frequently coded philosophy (18 occurrences).

Considering the number of different philosophical possibilities and permutations that presented themselves, I began to wonder if a philosophical comparison between the purposes of multi-age art educators and the tenets of multi-age education would be feasible. Once again, it is possible that the lack of professional autonomy offered to these teachers in terms of participating in multi-age models of art education could be contributing to this philosophical diversity. Since the art teachers were not asked if they were willing to accept mixed-age groupings, it stands to reason that they may not share much in common in terms of philosophical orientation. For the most part, the participants’ only certain common ground is that they happened to have been assigned mixed-age groups in their art classrooms.

The next step in comparing the respondents’ personal theoretical orientations toward art education with the tenets of multi-age education was initiated by the contents of question 17 on the mailed survey: “Do you feel that the philosophies of multi-age education support or conflict with your personal philosophy toward art education?” The question was close-ended in nature and the results can be found in Table 10. I will briefly note that one respondent selected two answers and marked that the philosophies of multi-age education both supported and conflicted with his or her theoretical orientation toward art education. The respondent indicated that this was a purposeful selection and, as a result, his or her double answer created a possible total of 37 tabulated responses. Of the possible 37 answers, 14 responses (37.83%) indicated the art teachers’ belief that the theories of multi-age education supported their personal philosophies of art education. In contrast, 8 responses (21.62%) represented those art teachers who felt there was a conflict between their philosophies of art education and the concepts of multi-age education.
Table 9.  
*Frequency Distribution: Philosophies of Art Education Held by Multi-age Art Educators*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philosophy of Art Education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DBAE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Self-Expression/Studio Based</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Arts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Culture Art Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Art Appreciation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced Eclecticism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBAE and Creative Self-Expression</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBAE, Creative Self-Expression, Integrated Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBAE, Creative Self-Expression, Integrated Arts, Visual Culture Art Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBAE, Creative Self-Expression, Standards Based Art Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBAE, Integrated Arts, Standards Based Art Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBAE, Integrated Arts, Visual Culture Art Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Self-Expression, Visual Culture Art Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Self-Expression, Integrated Arts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Self-Expression, Critical or Divergent Thinking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Arts, Visual Culture Art Education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Art Appreciation, and Balanced Eclecticism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Art Appreciation, Critical or Divergent Thinking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards Based Art Education, Balanced Eclecticism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were also some indications that this issue of philosophical fit was confusing to some of the respondents. Of all the items on the survey, question 17 received both the highest total of *no responses* and the highest total of respondents to select, “I don’t know.” To be specific, there were 8 responses (21.62%) that indicated that the art teachers didn’t know if the theories supported or conflicted with one another; there were 5 respondents (13.51%) who didn’t answer. Furthermore, there was one respondent that drew-in their own check box and marked it with the word “neither” written out to the side and no further explanation. One other respondent stated that the support or conflict between philosophies didn’t really matter: “For me, if the class has about 20 students, multi-age or not, it’s fine.”

Table 10.

*Frequency Distribution: Perceived Fit Between Philosophies of Multi-age Education and Personal Philosophies of Art Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Relationship Between Philosophies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Don’t Know</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t Matter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* One respondent indicated that he or she purposefully marked two answers, resulting in a possible total of 37 responses.

A follow-up question asked the respondents to explain themselves: Why did they feel that the philosophies of multi-age education either supported or conflicted with their personal philosophy of art education? Unfortunately, the majority of the respondents were unable to articulate their explanations in such a way that meaningfully related their answers back to their originally identified philosophy of art education. Most of the answers given by the multi-age art
teachers either expressed an aspect that they liked, disliked, or were uncertain about multi-age education in general and did not clearly connect this opinion to their personal philosophy of art education. A survey participant who was coded as having a philosophical mix between DBAE and creative self-expression provided an example that typifies such disconnected responses. This respondent stated: “When they come to art in their multi-age groups I think it not only conflicts [with] my art philosophy but also the true philosophy of multi-age education. In philosophy I think multi-age is a good thing. I have never seen it implemented correctly.” While it is clear that this respondent feels that there is conflict between the two philosophies, he or she does not explain what this conflict is or how it relates to either DBAE or creative self-expression.

I was only able to clearly identify and code four art teachers’ responses that made direct connections back to their originally expressed philosophy of art education. One of these respondents was coded with having philosophical alliance with the theories of creative self-expression and visual culture art education. This respondent felt that these concepts were supported by the philosophies of multi-age education. In explanation of this opinion, the respondent was able to relate his or her answer back to some aspects of creativity in art education: “I find multi-age levels stimulate the students’ creativity and problem solving skills.” Another respondent who felt there was support between the two philosophies was able to relate his or her explanation back to his or her partial alliance with integrated arts theories: “Multi-age education lends itself very well to integrated and interdisciplinary teaching.” One other respondent saw conflict between the two philosophies and was able to explain why he or she felt that multi-age models didn’t match well with his or her held beliefs in creative self-expression: “Younger children can feel intimidated by older students in their class and thus become uncomfortable about sharing/expressing creative ideas.” Finally, a different respondent who had been coded as having philosophical connections to DBAE, creative-self expression, and visual culture art education, felt that the theories of nongradedness were supportive of these philosophies. This respondent was able to articulate some connections between multi-age education and the studio aspects advocated by creative self-expression. This art teacher saw comparisons between the experiences of artists interacting in their studios with the experiences of multi-age classrooms:

I believe that artists contribute much to our society and grow through
study/experiences with other artists of all ages and levels of experience. Multi-age classes experience this sharing as well, and I have seen tremendous personal and creative growth and cooperative learning at its best in art classes.

An overall summary of the survey items related to the theme of compatibility of purpose and philosophy shows that the results were largely inconclusive. The enormous amounts of combinations and permutations involved in the coding of the respondents’ descriptions of their philosophies of art education did not reveal significant patterns, except to say that 11 multi-age art teachers seemed to have alliances with the combined theories of DBAE and creative self-expression. Whether this vast diversity in responses represents the state of art education in general, the random effect of the lack of professional autonomy involved in multi-age art education assignment, or my own poor ability to decipher and code responses is indeterminable. The survey results do show that 14 nongraded art educators (37.83% of all possible responses) felt that the theories of multi-age education supported their own philosophies of art education. Eight art teachers felt that the theories conflicted with each other. Overall, though, the participants were unable to clearly articulate how their responses and opinions related back to their originally stated philosophies of art education. Possible explanations for such results include that the art teachers’ busy schedule does not allow much time for philosophical ruminations or to write expansive survey answers, the survey question may have been poorly written, or I may have done a poor job in coding, interpreting, and making connections between answers.

**Art Teachers’ Perceptions**

There were several questions on the mailed survey that dealt with the opinions and perceptions of the multi-age art teachers. I wanted to know the art teachers’ overall opinion of multi-age art education, as well as the perceived advantages and disadvantages presented by nongraded art instruction. The questions that will be addressed in this section include item numbers 13, 14, and 19. Question 13 stated: “Please describe any advantages you perceive to teaching art to multi-age classes.” The question was open-ended and the answers required careful content analysis, pre-figured coding, open coding, and tabulation before findings could be reached. The results of this process are shown in Table 11. The responses of 21 of the 36 art teachers (58.33%) indicated that scaffolding techniques of some sort presented the greatest
advantages of multi-age art instruction. Some of these respondents referred to peer assistance, peer tutoring, cooperative learning groups, or specific benefits to younger or older students. One respondent referred to the bidirectional benefits of such scaffolding techniques: “Students who are low in areas can see older students as role models and older students can learn more by helping the low students.”

Improved classroom management was identified as an advantage by five art teachers (13.88%). An art teacher who only worked with multi-age classes consisting of kindergarten and first grade students replied, “[It’s] much easier to begin the year with Ks [kindergartners], they see the appropriate behaviors modeled by the first graders.” Another respondent echoed this sentiment: “Older students can model class procedures, for example how we distribute supplies.” In general, these statements are similar to those expressed in a study involving a team of multi-age teachers that reported spending less time on the introduction of classroom management procedures at the beginning of each school year (McCarthey et al., 1996). The more experienced students helped the newer students to learn the established routines of the multi-age environment. Still another survey participant thought the advantages in classroom behavior went to those peers who were more advanced in age: “I find that older students are better behaved in multi-aged classes and help fellow students solve simple problems.”

There were four other respondents (11.11%) who felt the use of developmental groupings by multi-age homeroom teachers was an advantage. An example of this point of view includes the following statement: “Since my school sends them to art grouped by level to another subject, they are all pretty much on the same level. So that really helps and makes it easier to teach them.” There were four other respondents (11.11%) who took an opportunity to express negativity toward the use of mixed-age groupings in art. One of these respondents wrote: “I see no advantages to teaching art to multi-age classes. The students are at different physical and emotional (maturity) levels.”

There were two respondents (5.1%) who expressed appreciation for the cooperative or positive attitudes of their multi-age students. Although only one respondent thought that multi-age groupings resulted in the advantageous production of fewer lesson plans per week, this is still a topic that will deserve some attention later in qualitative analysis.
Table 11.  
*Frequency Distribution: Reported Advantages of Multi-age Art Instruction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding: peer assistance/tutoring, cooperative learning, etc.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Groupings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Positive or Cooperative Attitude</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Lesson Planning During Year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Difference From Graded Classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegible Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 14 was also open-ended and similar in nature and structure: “*Please describe any disadvantages you perceive to teaching art to multi-age classes.*” Once again, I approached the reported data through a careful process of content analysis and coding before reaching the results shown in Table 12. Of the 36 survey participants, 20 (55.55%) responded by indicating that it was a disadvantage to have differing developmental levels within an art classroom. Some of the respondents felt that this difference in developmental levels could result in lessons that frustrated younger students, while others felt that it created situations that were disadvantageous for the older students. One respondent summed up both views by reporting: “Skill levels vary greatly. If you teach to the middle, slower student are lost while advanced students are bored.”

There were three art teachers (8.33%) that lamented the loss of a unique and distinctive kindergarten curriculum that had been altered in the process of combining it with upper grade levels. One of these respondents felt that these younger students lost out on “a lot of kindergarten type curriculum – experimenting, finger painting” and implied that such experimentation was important to the development of these children. There were three other informants (8.33%) that felt the disadvantages of multi-age art instruction primarily manifested
themselves when three or more grade levels were combined in one group. One respondent wrote: “The difference in age and development between K/2 and 3/5 is too great a span. I would rather there only be one level difference, say 3/4 or 4/5 or 1/2, etc.”

There were two art teachers (5.55%) who found disadvantages in the flexible grouping process used by some multi-age team teachers. As discussed and illustrated earlier in analysis (see Figure 3), multi-age team teachers who flexibly regroup their students based on changing developmental needs can often create inconsistent and changing art room rosters as a result. One of the respondents who identified the results of flexible regrouping as a disadvantage wrote: “The constant moving of homeroom students messes up our classes. Students could be moved every nine weeks if need be. Also if they are moved around some times they miss out or repeat the same lesson if they switch to another teacher in the same area.” This participant has identified an additional difficulty that could arise in the process of flexible regrouping. In cases where a school has more than one art teacher, flexible regrouping can cause further confusion if the student happens to be switched from one art teacher to another.

Additionally, two respondents (5.55%) mentioned the disadvantages involved in the extra time, work, and effort that planning for nongraded instruction created. Grant and Johnson (1996) noted that the formation of multi-age classes does require extra time, energy, and creativity on the part of nongraded instructors and that this factor could be an impediment to implementation. Two (5.55%) other respondents felt like the use of developmental groupings by multi-age homeroom teachers was not an advantage. The respondents felt as if the developmental grouping of students by subject area did not necessarily match the students’ level of artistic development, and therefore created art room rosters of unevenly mixed skills. “They are usually sent to art class in their developmental ‘reading’ group, or ‘math’ group. They are never sent in groups of equal visual acuity or eye-hand coordination,” wrote one respondent.

There were two more respondents (5.55%) who also discussed the difficulties of dealing with differing developmental and skill levels, but these respondents distinguished their comments from others by acknowledging that these differences and difficulties can be found in graded classrooms as well. One of these respondents stated, “On an extremely limited basis there is an isolated [child] . . . whose fine motor skills and perceptual skills aren’t at the level of their reading and math abilities and that of their peers . . . but this occurs in non multi-age as well [emphasis respondent].” A similar sentiment was expressed by the other respondent: “It’s
discouraging for a 5th grader to see a 4th grader doing a much better job. On the other hand, they would be in the bottom group if it was just 5th graders.”

Additionally, two respondents expressed that there were no disadvantages to multi-age art instruction. One respondent discussed that multi-age models don’t match well with State Standards that include grade level expectations in art. Another respondent thought that mixed-age groupings led to behavior regression in older students, and one other participant did not respond. While only one respondent thought that the multi-age practice of looping was a disadvantage because it did not allow the art teacher to repeat the same art lessons from year to year, this is still a topic that will deserve some attention in later analysis.

In consideration of both the perceived advantages and disadvantages of mixed-age art instruction, I’d like to briefly note an interesting observation that occurred to me when comparing the most frequent responses from each of the resulting tables (see Table 11 and 12). By definition, scaffolding techniques require the presence of varying ability levels. Considering this, it would seem that the presence of different developmental groups in multi-age art classes results in both the most frequently mentioned advantage of multi-age art instruction (scaffolding) and the most frequently mentioned disadvantage (the differing developmental levels are too great). There were a total of 21 art teachers who found advantages in the use of scaffolding techniques. There were a total of 20 art teachers who found the presence of differing developmental levels to be too great. When I compared these two figures with the total number of art teachers who returned a completed survey (36), it became obvious to me that some of the respondents thought that the presence of differing developmental levels was both an advantage and a disadvantage to nongraded art instruction. In a sense, the catalyst of multi-age art education’s most frequently mentioned advantage was also the catalyst for its most frequently mentioned disadvantage.

I was curious to find how many art teachers viewed this catalyst as both an advantage and a disadvantage. I reviewed the survey responses again and created a Venn diagram to show the number of art teachers who felt that scaffolding techniques were advantageous, but also felt it was difficult to deal with differing developmental levels (see Figure 13). The diagram reveals 13 teachers (36.11% of the original 36) whose responses imply that they saw the presence of differing development levels to be a catalyst for both the most frequently listed advantage and disadvantage. The diagram also suggests that there may be a fine line or gray area between
where the presence of differing developmental levels is perceived as an advantage or disadvantage. The diagram, then, also represents a sort of conundrum that will be readdressed later in analysis and conclusions.

Table 12.  
*Frequency Distribution: Reported Disadvantages of Multi-age Art Instruction*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differing Developmental Levels are Too Great</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Distinctive Kindergarten Curriculum</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Grade Level Combinations Are Difficult; Two Are Fine</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible Grouping Creates Inconsistent Art Rosters</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Time, Effort, and Work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Groupings Did Not Match the Students’ Level of Artistic Development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes Difficulty in Instructing Differing Development Levels, but Acknowledges That These Differences Occur in Graded Classrooms Too</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Disadvantages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-age Models Have Poor Fit With Grade Level Expectations in Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Regression in Older Students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looping Does Not Allow for Repeatability of Yearly Art Projects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Returning again to the survey questions, item 19 asked: "Overall, do you support or oppose multi-age grouping in elementary art classrooms?" Having obtained specific information about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of multi-age art education, I was curious to find the art teachers’ holistic perceptions as well. Question 19 was close-ended in nature, but two participants wrote in additional answers. The responses were tabulated and the results are shown in Figure 14. Of the 36 informants, 20 art teachers (55.56%) indicated their overall support for using multi-age groupings in art classrooms. In contrast, 8 art teachers (22.22%) reported their overall opposition to multi-age models of art education at the elementary level. There were 6 teachers who responded by indicating that they didn’t know whether they supported or opposed the use of mixed-age groupings in elementary art classrooms. One respondent suggested that it didn’t matter and referred my attention to one of his or her previous answers that stated, “For me, if the class has about 20 students, multi-age or not, its fine.” Another respondent wrote-in an answer that stated, “I do not care.” This respondent offered no additional explanation.
A follow-up question asked the respondents to explain their indicated support or opposition to multi-age art education. The question was open-ended in design and once again required content analysis and coding before results could be determined. In this case I decided to report the findings in three separate categories in order to make distinctions between the explanations of those support multi-age art education, oppose multi-age art education, or did not list either support or opposition to multi-age art education.

Table 13 shows the coded results of those who indicated their overall support for multi-age groupings in elementary art classrooms. Of the 20 respondents who supported such groupings, 9 of the art teachers (45%) offered a general statement of approval that included at least one suggestion or caveat that usually referred to the organizational structure of multi-age classrooms. An example of such a response comes from a survey participant who stated: “I enjoy and support the multi-age grouping of my classes, but would prefer having K [kindergarten] alone or having two year groupings (K-1; 2-3; 4-5).” Another respondent wrote: “I support multi-age grouping with regular classes – But **NOT** with ESE classes [emphasis
The typical suggestions attached to the statements of approval referred to class size, the inclusion of kindergarten, the span of grades grouped in multi-age classes, or the inclusion of ESE or IEP students. It’s possible that the art teachers decided to offer suggestions or caveats to this response since it was the last open-ended item on the survey. Respondents may have reached the end of the survey and realized that they still had some suggestions that they would like to express, but hadn’t found an opportunity to share these ideas earlier in the survey. It is possible that educators, and perhaps art educators in particular, are rarely given a chance to voice their opinions on educational policy and this question may have served as an opportunity for participants to share their views. Perhaps some respondents were hopeful that this research study would be used to bring about change and minor adjustments in the grouping policies of multi-age education.

Out of the 20 art teachers who indicated their support of multi-age art education, there were 5 (25%) who explained this support by offering general statements that showed their philosophical alliance with the theories of nongradedness. While a previous question showed respondents to have difficulty in articulating connections to their personal philosophies of art education, these 5 art teachers were rather articulate and clear, if not always expansive, in expressing their belief of the concepts on which multi-age education has been founded. One respondent wrote: “Students mature at different rates and the multi-age grouping doesn’t pigeon-hole a child. Within that three year period, the student can progress at his/her own rate in a non-threatening environment.” Another art teacher expressed that “I always believe children can learn from one another no matter what age they are.” One more respondent stated: “It is an excellent way to group children of different levels. It allows for group work and understanding of the lesson.”

There were two art teachers who explained their support of multi-age art education as if it were their professional duty and obligation to support the organizational structure of their schools. One of these respondents wrote: “I believe the educational professional should do what it takes to promote learning.” Another respondent restated his or her belief that the shared experiences of studio artists have much in common with multi-age configurations. Another survey participant echoed themes expressed by others in earlier questions by suggesting that multi-age groupings really aren’t all that different from graded classrooms: “It really is not a big deal to me since I do not have a cast in stone grade level orientated curriculum and students’
skills vary so much anyway. All teachers are/should be ‘multi-age’ capable.” There was one art teacher who expressed his or her support for multi-age art education based on its effectiveness for grouping ESE students together. Finally there was a respondent who indicated his or her support and grasp of the multi-age philosophy, but concluded with a vague reference to changing educational trends and grade level benchmarks.

Table 13.  
*Frequency Distribution: Respondents’ Explanations of Overall Support for Multi-age Art Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature or Description of Explanation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Those Who Expressed Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Support of Multi-age Philosophy Offered with Suggestions (Class Size, Age Span, Kindergarten, ESE)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responded with General Statement of Advocacy for Multi-age Philosophies</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responded with Statement of Professional Responsibility and Duty to Promote Learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-age Grouping Resembles Experiences of Studio Artists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-age Art Classes Are Not That Different: Multiple Levels Exist in Any Art Group (Age-Graded)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-age Groupings are Supportive of ESE Students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed Grasp of Philosophy; Trends are Changing to Grade Level Benchmarks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 20. Only the 20 respondents who had expressed support for multi-age art Education are included in the table. The percentages have been adjusted accordingly.*
Table 14 shows the coded results of those who indicated overall opposition toward multi-age groupings in elementary art classrooms. Of the eight respondents who expressed such opposition, four art teachers (50%) indicated that their stance was derived from experiences where it was difficult to reach the differing developmental levels in mixed-age art settings. One of these eight respondents wrote:

Overall in special areas such as art, music, and P.E. [physical education] it is difficult to reach all ages/abilities of students with one type of lesson. If administration doesn’t regulate ability levels of students by grade or age, then it is much more difficult for the teacher to reach all students’ needs and abilities with one lesson.

The remaining four respondents who expressed their opposition to multi-age groupings in art class each gave different explanations as to the reason for his or her opposition. There was one respondent who indicated that his or her opposition stemmed from the effects of flexible regrouping practices used by teams of multi-age homeroom teachers: “The kids are shuffled around all day, going from teacher to teacher.” Another respondent’s opposition stemmed from the extra time and work involved in planning, particularly as a result of multi-age looping practices that do not allow teachers to repeat lessons from year to year. There was another survey participant who felt that mixed-age groupings of students made assessment of student artwork difficult: “Honestly, when assessing their artwork, I’m not always cueing into the differences in who is a 3rd grader who is a 4th grader out of this group and giving the age difference its consideration.” One final respondent expressed his or her preference for developmental groups (“they could be multi-aged”) and stated that “test results have shown me that concepts are better understood” by students in such developmental groups.

Table 15 shows the coded results from the combined survey participants who did not list overall support or opposition toward multi-age art education. Of these eight respondents, three (37.5%) seemed to have mixed opinions and were unable to commit to overall support or opposition at this point in time. As one participant phrased his or her response: “I’ve seen both pros and cons of this multi-age group [emphasis respondent].” It is worth noting that one of these art teachers had not yet completed his or her first year of multi-age art instruction at the time the survey was administered, completed, and returned. The other two respondents with mixed opinions were still working within their first 1-3 years of multi-age teaching experience. Two of these three respondents were also within their first 5 years of total teaching experience.
Quite simply, some of these art teachers may have needed more time and experience to make up their minds.

Table 14.
*Frequency Distribution: Respondents’ Explanations of Overall Opposition Toward Multi-age Art Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature or Description of Explanation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Those Who Expressed Opposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficult To Reach Differing Developmental Levels</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible Grouping Creates Inconsistent Art Rosters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires Extra Time, Effort, and Work (Looping Does Not Allow for Repeatability of Annual Projects)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult To Do Fair Assessment of Students’ Artwork</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefers Developmental Groups “They Could Be Multi-aged” Test Results Favor Such Groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 8. Only the 8 respondents who had expressed opposition toward multi-age art education are included in the table. The percentages have been adjusted accordingly.*

There were two other respondents that seemed neutral in their opinion toward mixed-age groupings in art classrooms. The overall focus of these responses seemed to be that it didn’t matter whether or not students were in multi-age groups because “it really hasn’t stopped the way I teach.” There was one other respondent who supported the use of multi-age grouping in general classrooms but stated, “I don’t think it works especially well for art, music, or P.E.” Another participant indicated his or her opposition to multi-age art education, but did not
respond with an explanation. As mentioned earlier, there was also one respondent who had simply stated that, “I don’t care.”

Table 15.
Frequency Distribution: Explanations from Respondents Who Did Not List Either Overall Support or Opposition Toward Multi-age Art Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature or Description of Explanation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Those Who Did Not Either Support or Oppose Multi-age Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Opinion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral (Can Teach Either Way)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Offers Support of Multi-age Philosophy, But Not For Art, Music, and P.E.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I Don’t Care”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 8. Only the 8 respondents who did not express support or opposition toward multi-age art education are included in the table. The percentages have been adjusted accordingly.

A summary of the survey questions that dealt with the opinions and perceptions of the 36 multi-age art teachers is useful in giving a holistic picture of the art teachers’ overall view toward nongraded art instruction. By far the most frequently reported advantage of multi-age art instruction related to the model’s use of scaffolding techniques. In contrast, the most often stated disadvantage was that the differences in developmental levels within mixed-age art classes were too great. A comparative analysis showed that many of the same art teachers who felt that scaffolding was advantageous also thought that the existence of differing developmental levels was disadvantageous. In spite of a lack of professional autonomy and a lack of multi-age art training, 20 of the 36 art teachers indicated their support of nongraded art education. There were
8 art teachers who opposed multi-age art education and 8 more that did not support or oppose for varying reasons.

**Crossbreaks and a Closer Look**

Perhaps because most of the surveyed multi-age art educators had not been given a choice as to whether or not they were willing to participate in multi-age art education, the survey data revealed little about the art teachers themselves except to say that they varied greatly in many aspects. I hadn’t expected this and I wanted to know more about my surveyed participants, particularly in terms of hidden patterns that the survey data may have contained. So I decided to tabulate some crossbreak tables that compared the art teachers’ overall support or opposition for multi-age art education with a variety of descriptive background variables. Crossbreak tables are charts that show the relationship, or lack of relationship, between all combinations of two or more nominal variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Although this method of analysis was emergent (not a part of my original research strategy), I will discuss some of the findings as they did influence my focus throughout the remainder of my inquiry into multi-age art education.

Overall my crossbreak analysis categorically compared the art teachers’ support or opposition to multi-age art education with the following variables: (a) the degree nongradedness at the teachers’ work site, (b) the number of years of multi-age teaching experience, (c) the number of years of total teaching experience, (d) the nature of the art teachers’ assignment to nongraded structures, (e) the presence of flexibly regrouped art rosters, (f) the teachers’ participation in helpful training, and (g) the specific workshops that art teachers reported to be helpful. For the most part, these crossbreak tables did not reveal great disparities between the above variables and the participants’ expressed support or opposition of multi-age art education (see complete results in Appendix Q). There was some evidence that art teachers in their first 5 years of employment or in their first 3 years of a multi-age teaching assignment had a higher percentage of uncertainty about their support or opposition of multi-age art education. Also the small sub-sample of eight teachers who worked at school sites that were completely nongraded did have a higher percentage of opposition toward multi-age art education. This comparison, though, seemed very lopsided in terms of those who worked at completely multi-aged schools and those who didn’t (8 respondents compared to 28 respondents). The more compelling
patterns appeared in the crossbreak tables that addressed teacher training, specific types of training, and the presence of flexibly regrouped art rosters.

Table 16 shows the results of the crossbreak table that categorically compared the art teachers’ overall stance on multi-age art education with their reported participation in trainings helpful to nongraded art instruction. The results show that 66.66% of the teachers who reported participation in useful training supported multi-age art education, in comparison to 42.11% of those teachers who reported they had not participated in meaningful training. Additionally, 31.58% of those without meaningful training opposed multi-age art education, in comparison to the 13.33% of those who had useful training. There is, however, more than one way to interpret this data. It is possible that the trainings were so useful and informative to these art teachers that it had an impact on their practice and positively affected their perception toward multi-age art education. It is just as possible, though, that these teachers already supported or were interested in multi-age art education. As a result they may have been more inclined to volunteer and attend trainings on related topics.

Table 16.
Crossbreak Table: Participation in Training Tabulated with Overall Stance Toward Multi-age Art Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation In Training</th>
<th>Supports Multi-age</th>
<th>Opposes Multi-age</th>
<th>I Don’t Know</th>
<th>Doesn’t Matter</th>
<th>I Don’t Care</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66.66%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.66%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.11%</td>
<td>31.58%</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In an earlier analysis of the specific trainings attended and listed by the surveyed art teachers, I discussed how the content of some of these trainings might not have been as directly related to the concepts of multi-age education as the content of other trainings. With that thought in mind, I also tabulated a crossbreak table that categorically compared the art teachers’ stance
toward multi-age art education with each specific training that was listed as being useful (see Table 17). While only two teachers with training opposed multi-age education, one of them, interestingly enough, happened to be an art teacher that had taken part in a workshop designed specifically for nongraded instruction. The crossbreak table reveals that the second teacher in this group who opposed multi-age art education was the same respondent who had reported his or her participation in a useful training, but then did not identify what this useful training was. The three tabulated responses that fell into the category of being unsure about their stance toward multi-age art education had listed classroom management and ESOL as the helpful trainings that they had attended. These tabulations came from respondents who did not list any other useful training other than classroom management and ESOL workshops. The content of these trainings, while no doubt helpful, seem to have weaker direct connections to multi-age education than others on this list. Finally, there was one tabulation that fell in the column categorized by the quote, “I Don’t Care”. This tabulation was provided by the same participant who had responded that he or she had participated in helpful trainings, but specified the titles of these trainings only by stating, “All of them.”

The crossbreak table seems to imply that there might be an even stronger relationship between support of multi-age art education and participation in useful training than was shown in the previous crossbreak table (see Table 16). Overall, the results suggest the possibility that participation in trainings with stronger connections to the content and methods of multi-age education might have a greater relationship with overall support for nongraded art education. While this may indeed be the case, it should be restated that it is just as likely that art educators who already support multi-age education may be more inclined to volunteer for workshops that have relevance to such educational and professional interests.

As discussed earlier in analysis, the flexible regrouping of students from teacher to teacher within team-taught models of multi-age instruction can result in changes in the art teachers’ class rosters even in the middle of ongoing art projects. The initial analysis of survey data rarely showed this regrouping of students to have a negative impact. While 18 art teachers reported that they encountered flexibly regrouped art rosters at some of their school sites, only 3 art teachers every mentioned this practice as being a disadvantage or as playing a role in their opposition to multi-age art instruction. My sensibilities as an art educator suspected that there
might be more to this issue than initially revealed by the surveys and I thought that a crossbreak table might help to search for hidden patterns in the data.

**Table 17.**
Crossbreak Table: Participation in Specific Trainings Tabulated with Overall Stance Toward Multi-age Art Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content of Workshop</th>
<th>Supports Multi-age</th>
<th>Opposes Multi-age</th>
<th>I Don’t Know</th>
<th>Doesn’t Matter</th>
<th>I Don’t Care</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-age Training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Instruction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Education In-Service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experience (Internship/High School)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveled Instruction in Gifted Classrooms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Science Institute</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“All of Them”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18 shows the results of a crossbreak table that categorically compared the art teachers’ overall stance toward multi-age art education with the presence of flexible regrouped art room rosters. The first two rows of the crossbreak table show a comparison between art teachers who work with multi-age team teachers who flexibly regroup their art rosters and those art teachers who work with multi-age team teachers who do not. The results show that 71.42% of the teachers who experience consistent team-taught student rosters supported multi-age art education, in comparison to 44.44% of those teachers who experienced inconsistent student rosters. Additionally, 27.77% of those with inconsistent art room rosters opposed multi-age art education, in comparison to the 7.1% of those who had consistent team-taught student rosters.

I had not forgotten that a multi-age class with just one homeroom teacher must, in theory, always have consistent rosters because such a homeroom instructor would not have a teaching partner with which to rearrange students. With this in mind, I added a third row to the crossbreak table that included the results of the five multi-age classes that were taught by a single homeroom teacher rather than teams of teachers. In the fourth row, I combined and refigured the tabulations from rows one and three in order to provide a more holistic picture of all art classrooms from the survey results that were not flexible regrouped. The adjusted figures show that 68.42% of the surveyed art teachers with consistent student rosters support multi-age art education, in comparison to the 44.44% of those who experience flexible regrouping. The adjustments also show that 27.77% of those with inconsistent art room rosters opposed multi-age art education, in comparison to the 15.79% of those who don’t. Because of its relevance, I will briefly restate that the survey results included responses from an itinerant art teacher who worked at both one school where flexible regrouping occurred and at another school where it did not. This informant’s double response results in a total of 37 responses if the totals of row one and four are added. This respondent is actually tabulated three times only in the column categorized as “I Don’t Know.”

The results of this crossbreak table suggest that my suspicions may have been correct. The flexible regrouping of students that results in inconsistent art rosters may be more of factor than the initial survey data indicated. Of course there are likely a number of other possible explanations, including coincidence, for the pattern that emerged here. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that having an inconsistent class roster from one week to another when students are working on ongoing art projects could possibly be an inconvenience for multi-age art education. 
art educators. The crossbreak results imply that the issue of flexible grouping deserves some
textual content:...
educators. Although the results may not have been entirely conclusive, they did point toward emerging patterns that will be worth further attention in analysis and conclusions.

Summary

Survey research techniques were used to provide this study with contextual breadth as an important step in describing the qualities that characterize multi-age art instruction in identified public elementary school sites containing such models in the State of Florida. Of the 69 multi-age art educators identified through snowball sampling techniques, 36 respondents returned completed surveys for a 52.17% response rate. The results were analyzed and presented in categories of similar theme that included (a) the organizational structure and characteristics of the multi-age art classes and schools, (b) the background of the surveyed multi-age art teachers, (c) the practice of multi-age art instruction, (d) the compatibility between the purposes of art teachers and the philosophies of multi-age education, (e) the perceptions of multi-age art teachers, and (f) a closer look at the data through the use of crossbreak tables.

In terms of the general structure of the multi-age schools in question, the majority of art teachers (77.78%) reported that their school sites were only partially multi-age in configuration. There was much diversity in the degree of nongradedness within these school sites. One art teacher taught to as many as 35 multi-age art classes, while another art teacher only delivered instruction to a single multi-age group. The mean score of total multi-age art classes taught by the survey respondents was 14.74. The majority of multi-age art classes consisted of two or three consecutive grade level configurations. The classes generally did not appear to be uniquely small or large in terms of student enrollment. Most of the art teachers reported that they primarily worked with nongraded classes that were led by teams of teachers rather than by a single homeroom teacher. There were 18 responses that indicated that the team teachers’ use of flexible regrouping could result in inconsistent art room rosters for the multi-age art teachers, perhaps even in the middle of an ongoing art project.

The surveyed art teachers appeared to be diverse in terms of their overall teaching experience as well as their multi-age teaching experience. Most of the art teachers had at least some prior experience in working with multi-age groups of students, as only 6 of the 36 respondents (16.67%) reported that they were still completing their first year of such a teaching assignment. The majority of the multi-age art teachers (61.11%) were able to see their classes in
their own art rooms, but some art teachers did work in portables, travel from room to room, or some combination of all options. The subject of professional autonomy loomed large as 94.44% of the art teachers reported that multi-age models of instruction had been assigned to them and they had not been given a choice in the matter. The lack of professional autonomy involved in this assignment may explain the overall diversity in the background of the surveyed art educators. The art teachers seem to represent a sort of random sample (although not an experimentally valid random sample) since they did not play a significant role in their own assignment to multi-age models of art instruction. Furthermore, the majority of art teachers (52.78%) indicated that they had not participated in teacher training workshops that were useful in preparing for multi-age art classes. Only three art teachers (8.33%) reported taking part in training that was specifically designed on the subject of multi-age education.

In terms of instructional practice, most of the surveyed art teachers reported that they used classroom space that allowed for the grouping of students (83.33% of respondents) and audio visual equipment (52.77%) when delivering instruction to their nongraded art classes. Most of the respondents also reported that they found the use of cooperative learning groups (77.77%) and peer assistance (69.44%) to be effective methods in multi-age art instruction. In addition, 72.22% of the surveyed teachers also reported using thematic integration on occasion, although they reported this use with varying levels of enthusiasm.

The results of the survey items related to the compatibility between the purposes of art educators and the philosophies of multi-age education were largely inconclusive. There were 19 different combinations and permutations to the respondents’ coded descriptions of their personal philosophies of art education. Once again, the lack of professional autonomy extended to the surveyed art educators may have played a role in the apparent randomness of these results. The survey results did show that 14 nongraded art educators (37.83% of all possible responses) felt that the theories of multi-age education supported their own philosophies of art education. Eight art teachers felt that the theories conflicted with each other. There also was some evidence that the issue of philosophical support or conflict between the theories of art education and multi-age education was confusing to some of the respondents. A total of 14 informants either didn’t respond, didn’t know, or checked “neither” in response to this question. Overall the participants were unable to clearly articulate how their responses and opinions related back to their originally stated philosophies of art education.
In terms of the perceptions and opinions of the 36 surveyed art teachers, the majority of respondents (58.33%) most often stated that the use of scaffolding techniques presented the greatest advantages to multi-age grouping in the art room. In contrast, the most often stated disadvantages (55.55%) centered on the perception that the differences in student developmental levels within mixed-age art classes were too great. A comparative analysis showed that many of the same art teachers (13) who felt that scaffolding was an advantage, also thought that the existence of differing developmental levels was a disadvantage. This data implies that there is a fine line between the point where art teachers perceive there to be an advantage or disadvantage to having differing developmental groups in their art classrooms.

In spite of the lack of professional autonomy and the lack of multi-age training extended to the survey respondents, 20 of the 36 art teachers (55.56%) indicated their support of nongraded art education. There were 8 art teachers (22.22%) who opposed multi-age art education and 8 more (22.22%) that did not support or oppose for varying reasons. Most of the art teachers who supported nongraded art education explained this support with general statements that showed their understanding and agreement with the underlying concepts of multi-age education, although many of these responses contained suggestions attached to them. The most frequent responses to the opposition of multi-age art education continued to refer to the difficulty involved in reaching students of differing developmental levels.

In an effort to learn more about the surveyed respondents, an additional strategy was included in the analysis of data. Crossbreak tables were tabulated that compared various background characteristics of the art teachers with their overall support or opposition to multi-age art education. The most compelling patterns appeared in the crossbreak tables that addressed teacher training, specific types of training, and the presence of flexibly regrouped art rosters. The results indicated the possibility that those who had received relevant training may be more likely to support multi-age models of art education. It is also possible that the flexible regrouping of students that results in inconsistent art rosters may play more of a factor than the initial survey data indicated. The crossbreak tables showed that 68.42% of the surveyed art teachers with consistent student rosters supported multi-age art education, in comparison to the 44.44% of those who experienced flexible regrouping. Overall the crossbreak tables contributed to the broad contextual findings of multi-age art instruction established by the survey data. The crossbreak tables may have been most useful, however, in identifying emerging and hidden
patterns worthy of further exploration in the next chapter and in contributing to structurally corroborated conclusions.
CHAPTER FIVE:
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

The survey results presented in the previous chapter have been used to provide this study with contextual information and to examine multi-age art education in breadth. Qualitative fieldwork contributes a specific perspective to this broad view by describing the qualities that characterize multi-age art instruction in depth as well. As described in Chapter 3, the selected multi-age art teacher, Alice Pratt, was observed for approximately 25 hours as she delivered multi-age art instruction over a three-week period in April and early May of 2006. Another hour or so was spent observing Ms. Pratt and some of the students, parents, and faculty members of Rexrode Elementary School during an annual after-school art exhibit scheduled in early May. During my observations of Ms. Pratt and her multi-age art classes, I continuously wrote field notes that focused on rich details, the research questions at hand, and other emergent foci (Eisner, 1998a). Afterwards, the fieldnotes were taken home for re-writing, clarification, and expansion (see example in Appendix I).

I also conducted three qualitative interviews with Ms. Pratt that followed a pattern of questions based on focused life history, the details of experience, and reflections on meaning (Seidman, 1998). The interviews provided a better understanding of her perceptions toward multi-age art instruction as well as the purposes behind her actions and decision-making processes. The three interviews were tape-recorded and taken home and transcribed on word processing programs (see example in Appendix K). In addition to these interviews, I have also communicated with Ms. Pratt informally and through telephone calls and e-mail communications in order to clarify observed details. The information from these member-checking sessions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was added to the qualitative fieldnotes and transcribed interviews in appropriate locations next to the scenarios and instances that they helped to clarify.

I reviewed all of the written data from the fieldnotes and transcribed interviews line-by-line and used colored pencils to first assign color-coordinated prefigured codes and then emergent codes when they were applicable (see example in Appendixes N and O). I then took the coded chunks of data from all three sources (coded surveys, fieldnotes, and interviews) and compiled, clustered, and condensed them onto qualitative data category cards (Miles &
Huberman, 1994). Eisner (1998a) stated that qualitative researchers can use their notes, transcripts, and coded category cards to inductively formulate themes that provide cohesive focus when analyzing data and reaching conclusions.

The findings of my qualitative data analysis are primarily presented in the form of written narratives. In this process, I often use selected episodes from my fieldwork and display them in a narrative form that may include expressive language, or empathy, in order to provide opportunities for clear and rich interpretations (T. Anderson, 2000b; Eisner, 1998a; Goodall, 2000). Goodall refers to this particular approach as the new ethnography and characterizes the method as allowing for evocative, story-telling representations of fieldwork experiences, provided that the researcher does not make things up. The analysis of the qualitative fieldwork presented in this section uses such written narratives as a primary method for telling the “true” story (T. Anderson, 2000b) of multi-age art instruction as I observed it at Rexrode Elementary School.

In regard to the truthful and credible findings of my qualitative analysis, the events and conversations detailed in the following narratives are not necessarily presented in the order that they occurred during my observations at Rexrode Elementary School (T. Anderson, 2000a). Instead the analysis of the collected qualitative data has been grouped into categories of similar theme in order to make the presentation of findings more coherent. The clusters of themes that will be discussed in this analytical section include (a) an introduction to Ms. Pratt’s multi-age art classroom, (b) the organizational structure of the multi-age classes at Rexrode Elementary School, (c) Ms. Pratt’s strategies for structuring multi-art education at Rexrode Elementary (d) the use of thematic instruction, (e) the use of scaffolding and other peering techniques, (f) Ms. Pratt’s personal experiences with professional autonomy and training, and (g) the emerging similarities between graded and nongraded structures in art education.

**Introduction**

This was only my second trip to Rexrode Elementary School and my first trip during the early morning hours. I had been here once before to meet Ms. Pratt and her principal, but that was during the afternoon. As I drove my rental car up the street that led to Rexrode Elementary, I had no choice but to notice the groups of children who were safely chaperoned across the road on their way to school. Some of the students passed along the crosswalk by foot while others
were on bicycles and had colorful safety helmets strapped on top of their heads. Many of them were coming directly from the rows of newer looking beige houses on the other side of the street from the school. Eventually I was allowed to pass and make my way into a visitors’ parking space within the school grounds. I looked to my left and noticed many other cars lined-up and moving toward the front entrance area of the school. Many parents had driven their children to Rexrode Elementary and were dropping them off near the sidewalk, while others parked their cars and escorted small children into the school. As I exited the rental car, there was no denying the obvious. Rexrode Elementary was a neighborhood community school.

The school itself was a welcoming concrete structure that wasn’t painted sterile white, but instead had a calming cool overtone to its outside walls. It was a one-story structure with, in typical Florida-style, walkways on the outside rather than indoor hallways. The marquee on the front lawn had “Rexrode Elementary School” emblazoned across the top with a list of upcoming school events printed underneath. On the right hand side of the marquee was an illustration of the schools’ mascot, a knight, which I later learned was part of a medieval theme that permeated Rexrode Elementary. As I passed by the marquee with the illustrated caricature of the shining knight standing over me, I reviewed in my mind the information that I had gathered about Rexrode Elementary from public resources.

Rexrode Elementary School is located in a suburban community neighborhood and services approximately 940 students ranging from pre-kindergarteners to those students who would be traditionally labeled as fifth graders (greatschools.net, 2006). In terms of ethnicity, approximately three fourths of the students are white, and less than 15% are Hispanic. African American, Asian, and multiracial groups each make up less than 5% of the student population. Out of all of these ethnic groups, less than 5% of the school’s population consists of students who are still acquiring English as a second language. The school is well-attended with less than a 5% absence rate and less than 25% of the students are on a free and reduced lunch program, in comparison to the State average of 47%. Rexrode Elementary School’s faculty consists primarily of teachers with bachelor’s degrees (more than 60%), but also has a number of teachers such as Ms. Pratt who have earned a master’s degree as well (more than 30%). The school has been repeatedly designated as an “A” school by the State of Florida’s reigning system of school evaluation and accountability, The A+ Schools Program.
The school services a number of students in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs including deaf and hard of hearing, specific learning disabilities, varying exceptionalities, visually impaired, occupational and physical therapy, speech, language learning disabilities, and autistic students. The school provides many opportunities for the inclusion of ESE students within mainstreamed classrooms and other school functions. Although the inclusion model is emphasized at Rexrode Elementary, the ESE students still represent a small minority of the school’s overall population which mainly come from the local neighborhoods and communities of the surrounding suburban areas.

Rexrode Elementary School publicly advertises its multi-age program as well. In those public descriptions, the organizational structure of the school is characterized as including primary houses, rather than classes, made up of kindergarten, first, and second grades. Similar descriptions are offered of Rexrode Elementary’s intermediate houses which are made up of third, fourth and fifth graders. These same public descriptions place an emphasis on the school’s multi-age structure as a model designed to meet the individual needs of students and to provide the students with a continuity of caring. The public descriptions also expound upon the advantages of students looping or staying with the same group of teachers for a period of three years.

My mind snapped back to reality as I strode into Rexrode Elementary’s front office to find that I wasn’t the only one there to obtain a visitor’s pass. There were several parents waiting in line as well. They were here to volunteer their time as helpers to the classroom teachers at Rexrode Elementary School. When it was my turn, I was greeted with a smile by a helpful office employee who remembered me from my last visit. “Let me see if we still have your driver’s license picture on file,” she said. I gave her my last name again and she punched a few keys on the computer in front of her. “There it is,” she said and soon enough a yellow sticker with my smiling face and name was printing out of a small device next to the computer. “Do you remember how to get to Ms. Pratt’s room?”

Outside the office, down the sidewalk, and around the bend, I found my way to the art room where Ms. Pratt greeted me with a smile. “Good morning,” she said enthusiastically. She knew I was coming today and had cleared some table space and a corner area where I could set-up and take my fieldnotes. Ms. Pratt was already prepared for the beginning of the day and was just attending to a few small details by placing and stacking some large folders out and about the
room. I knew from her survey that she had been teaching art for over 16 years, but there was no mistaking the youthful enthusiasm with which she went about her business. As I settled in for a day of taking fieldnotes, I thought back to what else I already knew about Alice Pratt from her completed survey.

It was actually only after selecting Ms. Pratt for qualitative observations that I had decided to consciously look at the rest of the descriptive information on her survey. From that information, I was already aware that she taught art to 28 multi-age classes during the 2005–2006 school year and that she had worked with these mixed-age groups for about 7 or 8 years. While she felt as if the model of instruction had been assigned to her, she clarified that answer by reporting that her work site began as an inclusion model school before moving into multi-age groupings. The multi-age classes at her school could range anywhere from 15-20 students all the way up to 26-30 students. The differences in size usually depended on whether or not the multi-age class was a primary grouping of students (kindergarten, first, or second grade), an intermediate grouping of students (third, fourth, or fifth grade), or if the class had an ESE unit attached to it. Most of the multi-age classes at her school were taught by team teachers that did, indeed, reorganize and regroup their classroom art rosters throughout the year.

Her philosophy of art education was coded from the survey as a combination of the principles associated with DBAE, integrated arts, and a standards based approach to art education. According to Ms. Pratt’s survey, her focus was on “providing a wide variety of materials, [and] introducing basic art history and appreciation as my main concern. I make efforts with kids by building connections between cultures, history, science, social studies, math… I regularly integrate with school themes. I use the Sunshine State Standards (YOUR Florida Department of Education, 2005).” Overall, Ms. Pratt’s survey had indicated her support for multi-age grouping in elementary art classrooms.

As is usually the case, the numbers and statistical data didn’t paint the entire picture. Only over time would I learn that Ms. Pratt is about as decorated as they come in public school systems. Among many other honors, she has earned National Board Certification, has been a nominee of the School and County Teacher of the Year Award, has been rewarded multiple School Teacher of the Year Awards, was involved in teacher training, as well as the mentoring of both National Board Certification candidates and Alternative Certification candidates.
Like every day that I observed her, Ms Pratt was dressed professionally, but also casual enough to be prepared for any spills that might come her way during an inspired day of creativity and creation in her classroom. On this first day, Ms. Pratt was ready for a day of art making. Her elementary art classroom was as big as any I’ve ever seen in my many visits to art classes throughout the State of Florida. There were three large sets of tables that actually consisted of four separate tables that were pushed together to create bigger workspaces. There were lots of little chairs placed around the perimeters of these tables and it looked like about 12 students could sit and work together with ease. Each one of the tables had a sign suspended over the center of it. One sign designated that particular workspace as the Dolphin Table, while the other two signs designated the Alligator Table and the Jaguar Table. Overall, the three sets of tables were arranged in a broken horseshoe or “U” shape that left a large open area in the center that faced Ms. Pratt’s long whiteboard at the front of the room. While most of her floor was covered in tile, Ms. Pratt had placed a large roll of carpet in the open space created by the broken horseshoe. There was one more large set of tables toward the back of the room, near the Jaguar Table, but this table seemed to house a variety of art supplies and didn’t appear to be for student seating.

Ms. Pratt also had a desk space of her own set up in the front of the room, but I rarely saw her sit there and she seemed to use it more for storage and for items and paperwork that she wanted close by. Behind the desk and on both sides of the white board were two bulletin board areas that had art historical and cultural images on display. Most of the images showed masks of some sort or another, but they came from all different cultures, locations, and time periods including Korean masks, Native American masks, Roman, mardi gras, Yoruban, and so on. On either side of the room were long rows of counter space with sinks built into them. The counter space on the right side of the room, near the entranceway, had lots of cupboards both above and below the narrow workspace. The counter space on left did not have cupboards above it, but instead featured rows of windows that let the natural light of the beaming Florida sun find its way into the art room. The windows ran the length of the counter space until they both dead-ended near an exit door that led to a patio area, complete with five picnic tables, benches, and shrubbery. The patio was walled-in like a pleasant, miniature courtyard.

Across the back of the room, there were four additional doors. Each door respectively led to one of two storage rooms, a kiln room, and Ms. Pratt’s office which also featured a
window for clear viewing in or out if need be. As Ms. Pratt would later say to me, “I am supremely pleased with my surroundings! I am very fortunate to have started at this school when we opened ten years ago and this is the art suite. It is a wonderful place. Because I do a lot of fund raising, I have everything I could pretty much want!”

Welcome to Art, Multi-age Style

It wasn’t long before a teacher arrived at Ms. Pratt’s door with a class full of students right behind her. Ms. Pratt welcomed them into her classroom and the teacher walked in too and had a seat where she began to take attendance. At Rexrode Elementary, the homeroom period for some classes begins within an art, music, or physical education school space. When the homeroom period ends, the students just stay right where they are and begin their art, music, or P.E. class. Since this was officially homeroom time, many of the students still had backpacks and book bags which most of them slung across the backs of their chairs. Art class had not officially started yet, so several students went up to greet Ms. Pratt with smiles on their faces. Ms. Pratt would later tell me that this class is known as the Royal Family. Rexrode Elementary School’s website describes the Royal Family as a team-taught multi-age house made up of third, fourth and fifth graders. Because of the use of developmental groupings, Ms. Pratt tells me that this particular pod from the Royal Family is mainly comprised of students that would be traditionally known as third and fourth graders.

Eventually a bell rings over some sort of school sound system and Ms. Pratt calmly says, “Ok, the bell rang. Everyone should be in their seats.” Most of the kids are already in their chairs but a few are looking through the folders of artwork on their tables. Once she has everyone’s attention, Ms. Pratt says, “Today I’m going to introduce a new lesson to you. I need your cooperation and attention. I need everyone down here on the floor.” The students seem to know this routine and come down from the three large tables and pile on the carpet that Ms. Pratt had put out for them. Ms. Pratt sits in a chair in front of the carpet and begins to explain the new art project to the students. From nearby, Ms. Pratt pulls out a large art historical poster that shows a profile of a man’s face. At first glance, it looks like a typical painting. But as the students inspect further, they start to giggle as they realize that the face is made up entirely of fruits and vegetables that are arranged to look like facial features. Ms. Pratt informs the students that the painting was created by the 16th century Italian artist, Giuseppe Arcimboldo. The Royal Family collectively leans forward when Ms. Pratt points out that both the artist’s name and the
year the painting was completed are cleverly hidden and worked into the design of the various fruits and vegetables.

Ms. Pratt gives the students a little background information on Arcimboldo and explains that the title of this painting is *Summer*. “Why do you think this is called *Summer*?” she asks the students. Several hands shoot up and some of the students are anxious to point out the different types of summer vegetation that have been included in the profile portrait. Ms. Pratt acknowledges the answers and explains that Arcimboldo did a series of these portraits and each one is named after a different season. “The *Spring* picture actually has a lot of flowers. The *Fall* picture has pumpkins and squash.”

Ms. Pratt goes on to explain that their new art project is called *Fruity Faces* and that the assignment is for students to make their own drawings of faces that are also assembled out of various fruits and vegetables. Ms. Pratt shows the Royal Family a few examples made by other students and informs them that their drawings don’t have to be completed in a profile view like Arcimboldo’s work. The students can depict their Fruity Face portraits from a frontal view if they prefer. “In fact,” she tells them, “the face doesn’t even have to be a human face. It can be an animal, alien, or anything.”

“Can it be like a hockey guy? With a mask?” asks an excited boy.

“Yes, but it should be made of fruit.”

Ms. Pratt whirls around and grabs a box from the nearby “Jaguar Table.” The box is full of various kinds of plastic fruits and vegetables. The excitement grows from the students on the carpet when they are told that they can use the plastic fruit to help them draw or even to arrange fruity face designs right on the surface of the table. “Ask your mom if you can build a face out of real fruit on her kitchen table. I’ve had a couple of kids try that at home,” says Ms. Pratt with a smile. She then begins to pull out each plastic fruit and vegetable from the box and the students begin to name them. “You guys studied healthy eating earlier in the year,” she says, “so that’s the tie in.” To this comment, there is very little reaction of surprise, only continued excitement over the project. The brief mentioning of a “tie in” does not create either puzzled or startled looks. The students seem to treat it as a natural occurrence within their art lessons and even Ms. Pratt doesn’t dwell on it much more than that for the time being.
“Welcome to art, multi-age style,” I think to myself as I furiously write fieldnotes in my corner of the spacious room. Meanwhile the Royal Family scurries by me in various sizes, heights, and ages to get to their seats and begin their art project.

Organization and the Rexrode Royal Order

According to public information released by Rexrode Elementary, students in kindergarten through fifth grade classes are grouped into eight different, team-taught multi-age houses or pods. All eight multi-age groups have chosen a medieval-themed class name as a nod toward the school’s emblem and mascot, the Rexrode Knights. There are four primary multi-age houses made up of students traditionally labeled as kindergarten, first, and second graders. The names of the primary houses are the Knowledgeable Knights, the Resourceful Sorcerers, the Castle Guard, and the Knights of the Round Table. There are also four intermediate multi-age houses made up of students commonly labeled as third, fourth, and fifth graders. The names of the intermediate houses and pods are Excalibur, the Royal Family, King Arthur’s Court, and the Scholarly Squires. Even the music, art, and P.E. teachers have collectively formed a team name. “We are the Magicians,” Ms. Pratt later tells me. “We make magic happen. I mean, without us, school would just be ‘school’ is the way we look at it. Because we know the kids love to come to us.”

Compared to some of the other schools I had identified during my snowball sample, some of Rexrode Elementary’s multi-age teams seemed very large with as many as five and six teachers and classroom spaces working together in a single multi-age house or pod. Most of the multi-age teams I had encountered in my snowball sample and in literature (Chase & Doan, 1994; Fu et al., 1999; Miletta, 1996) consisted of three or fewer homeroom teachers. I imagined that it must be difficult for teams of this size to gather together for whole group activities or family meetings (Cushman, 1993) and it must be difficult for each homeroom teacher to get to know all of their students on the level suggested by multi-age literature (Chase & Doan, 1994; McCarlhey et al., 1996; Serig, 1995). I also wondered if multi-age houses of this size might be hard to keep track of and become a bit confusing for music, art, and P.E. teachers who see so many multi-age houses during the school week. Ms. Pratt, however, seemed to have little trouble tracking all of these classes and their configurations. During a follow-up phone conversation, I asked Ms. Pratt who was in charge of informing the art, music, and P.E. teachers
of the structure of each multi-age house and when such information was usually passed along. She explained that this information is distributed during pre-planning in the summer and that the office staff is usually in charge of disseminating such information. Ms. Pratt also indicated that she usually knows most of the multi-age configurations and accompanying team names and homeroom teachers well ahead of time. Ms. Pratt’s seven or so years of multi-age experience and the relative stability of the staff and multi-age teams at Rexrode Elementary may have played a factor in her familiarity with such large structures. The timely dissemination of information would, no doubt, be a crucial and necessary ingredient to the preplanning strategies of art teachers who were just beginning their multi-age teaching assignments.

Ms. Pratt and I did have many conversations about the structure of these large multi-age houses and how they were sent in smaller classroom pods to her art room. “By 9:35 classes are started for special areas [art, music, and P.E.],” Ms. Pratt began to explain to me. “They changed our schedule this year to where we have [all] eight teams come to us throughout the day. One team all goes to specials at the same time, which allows them common planning time and time for those teachers to work together. But also more important was the 90-minute uninterrupted language arts reading that they have to do according to State mandates. If we have a class first period, that group of students actually starts homeroom in my art class and then stays until the end of specials. Then the teacher leaves after homeroom and then comes back and collects them.”

“So this morning you had part of the Royal Family here,” I started, “and so they went ahead and had their homeroom in your room. And yesterday you also had the Royal Family in your room, but it was with a different homeroom teacher and a different part of the Royal Family because they are team taught.”

“Right. The students have art once a week. The teachers always have five days of specials and the teachers always have one planning period a day at our school.”

“So this morning while you had one part of the Royal Family in your room, then another part would have had music or P.E.,” I said.

“So that their whole team could meet together or plan or do what they need to do,” explained Ms. Pratt.

“Most of the multi-age pods are so big.” I began, “that it’s not even possible to have all of the Scholarly Squires with you for art. You have to split them up between you and Ms. Kahan
[Rexrode’s itinerant art teacher who was on campus four days a week]. So in this case, the size of the house makes you have to split them up.”

“Right,” confirmed Ms. Pratt. “So aside from that there’s really not any other big issues, really.”

Unlike some schools I have visited in the past, the music, art, and P.E. classes at Rexrode Elementary were all scheduled for the same duration of 40 minutes sessions with the exact same starting and ending times. Because Rexrode Elementary had multiple music, art, and P.E. teachers, it meant that even the larger multi-age houses could send all of their pods to special area classes at exactly the same time. This allowed the entire team of teachers to meet together and plan their house activities as described in multi-age literature (McCarthey et al., 1996). Of course multi-age teams of this size would not have that luxury in a school where, say, there was only one art, music, and P.E. teacher. Rexrode Elementary had the personnel and services to make this larger multi-age pod system work.

I was also curious to know about the structure of these mixed-age groupings as they came to art. I had remembered that the Royal Family was listed on Rexrode’s website as a multi-age combination of third, fourth, and fifth graders. Ms. Pratt had indicated, however, that the group I had watched during my first visit was mainly made up of just third and fourth graders. I wondered if that was typically the case at Rexrode Elementary and if that was typically the case in Ms. Pratt’s experiences as the art teacher. “The way it kind of shook out over time,” Ms. Pratt explained, “is the classes were either Ks [kindergarten], K-1s, or 1-2s. It is kind of how it worked and it depends on how the team is at when its time for specials. Normally they’re fairly developmentally grouped, but not always. The same applies to intermediate. There might be a class that’s heavy in third graders with some lower fourth graders, or fourth graders with some lower fifth graders and vice versa.”

It seemed as if the trend at Rexrode Elementary School was usually, but not always, on sending developmental rather than completely heterogeneous mixed-ability groups to their art, music, and P.E. classes. It also seemed that the newer kindergarten students at Rexrode Elementary were more likely to stay together as a group that most resembled a self-contained traditional grade level. As a result, Ms. Pratt most often saw art groups that resembled traditional kindergarten classes, and combinations of kindergarten and first, first and second, third and fourth, as well as fourth and fifth grades. In a sense, she more often saw two grade
levels combined together in developmental groups rather than the three grade configurations of entire multi-age houses themselves. While this appeared to be the general trend at Rexrode Elementary, it certainly was not always the case. Ms. Pratt’s own words actually best describe the true method behind the structure of the classes that came to her art room: “It depends on how the team is [configured] when its time for specials.”

One thing was certain; the royal order of the multi-age class names was well established and embedded within the school culture at Rexrode Elementary School. One day over lunch with the rest of the art, music, and P.E. teachers, the group of special area instructors began discussing their schedules for next year. How funny they must have sounded to any outsider that was unaware of the school’s multi-age structure and team names: “Well, if King Arthur’s Court is going to be a six person team next year, then they will have to be split between Alice and Ms. Kahan.” “And if the Sorcerers are going to feed into Excalibur next year then we need to think how that’s going to work out.” “Is Ms. Margolis going to loop up with the Royal Family like she was talking about?” But to the group of multi-age special area instructors at Rexrode Elementary, this conversation was merely business as usual.

**Structuring Multi-age Art Education at Rexrode Elementary**

Having established a general understanding of how the multi-age classes at Rexrode Elementary were structured and sent to art class, I also wanted to know how that structure affected the way that Ms. Pratt organized her own art lessons. “The first year we drove ourselves crazy doing multiple lessons every day for the different mixes of children that came in,” admitted Ms. Pratt. “Now that I’ve done multi-age for a while, oftentimes I’ll have a separate lesson for kindergarten. There are more kindergarten-based classes or ‘K-1’ most of the time. And then the ‘ones and twos,’ I generally have them doing the same thing. ‘Three’s and four’s’ are generally doing the same thing and ‘fours and fives’ are usually doing the same thing. So I’ve kind of streamlined it.”

“I was writing this down as you said that,” I commented. I always kept a pen and a notebook nearby during interviews, just in case. “If you have a ‘K to 1’ lesson and a ‘one to two’ and ‘four to five’… So you can be running about four lessons at a time?”

“Which is better than seven or eight,” explained Ms. Pratt. “I think the way I worked it out is pretty satisfactory for me and it’s really almost easier because it’s less planning. Less
planning… less preparation… I have more kids working on the same type of thing at a time, instead of these different lessons. So for me, I think it’s an advantage from a teacher’s point of view.”

Essentially, Ms. Pratt noticed a pattern in how most of the multi-age classes came to her art room in developmental groups of two consecutive grade level combinations. After some initial frustrations, she decided to organize her lessons developmentally as well. Instead of trying to target a lesson for each grade level within a specific group, she decided to design lessons that targeted a general developmental range or zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). In the case at Rexrode Elementary, these developmental groupings generally consisted of kindergarten and first grade groupings, first and second grade groupings, third and fourth grade groupings, fourth and fifth grade groupings, and a traditional grade level grouping in the case of some kindergarten-orientated classes. As a result, Ms. Pratt’s planning load was reduced from six distinct preparations a week (K-5) to four or five developmental preparations per week. This plan worked well for Ms. Pratt because of the established developmental grouping trends of the large multi-age houses at Rexrode Elementary School.

Applying this strategy to another situation could actually result in even a greater reduction in art teachers’ planning loads. Take for example multi-age homeroom teachers who tend to send more heterogeneously-mixed ability groups to art class. Such a case would cause the art teachers at these school sites to stretch their targeted developmental ranges just a bit wider. Perhaps an art teacher might have to design lessons that stretched to include developmental groupings that ranged from the traditional grade levels of K-2, 1-3, and 3-5, or whatever the case may be. Each stretch in the range of developmental groupings could result in less lesson plans per week.

Of course, greater stretches in the developmental levels within a multi-age class could also result in the frustrations and disadvantages most frequently expressed within the survey data. Every step closer to the edge of the zone of proximal development places that art teacher one step closer to the gray area between the perceived advantages of scaffolding and the disadvantages of developmental ranges that are perceived to be too wide (see Figure 13). As Ms. Pratt put it: “If I had low kindergartners mixed with really high second graders, they’re a little more separated. That would be even more challenging, I think, to keep those second graders learning. And that’s what a lot of people complain about. They said, ‘We don’t want second
graders in with the little guys. That’s not fair to them.” So that would be even more challenging.” The fine line between the perceived advantages of scaffolding techniques and the disadvantages of developmental levels that are perceived to be too great clearly deserves further attention in both analysis and conclusions.

“**You Can Reach More Than Just One Grade with a Lesson**”

In terms of reaching a greater developmental range with one art lesson, Ms. Pratt often did so with ease from multi-age class to multi-age class, rather than in one wide-ranging nongraded group. During a two-day stretch of field observations, I watched Ms. Pratt teach an art criticism lesson to nearly every developmental group within her multi-age art schedule. Rather than designing a brand new art criticism activity for each developmental level, she took one central activity and made basic adaptations to scale it up or down to reach the varying levels within Rexrode Elementary School as a whole. In this particular activity, Ms. Pratt displayed a series of 21 art historical prints around her room as a mock art museum (see Figure 15). Ms. Pratt had attached a number to each print and had carefully selected the examples herself to make sure that each reproduction had at least one person in the image. She also selected the prints based on the wide variety of apparent emotions that each image represented.

![Figure 15. A segment of the mock art museum inside Ms. Pratt’s room at Rexrode Elementary School.](image-url)
In the case of a more advanced developmental grouping from the Excalibur class, Ms. Pratt allowed the students to tour the museum first so that they could see the work up close and personal. Once the students returned to their seats, Ms. Pratt asked them a series of higher order questions and the students took note of their responses with pencil and paper. She would always remind the students that “there can be more than one right answer.” Some of Ms. Pratt’s questions asked the students to write down the numbers of images that (a) showed people that are enjoying themselves, (b) showed people that looked like they were lonely, (c) that looked unusual or silly, (d) showed people that may be in anguish or pain, (e) showed people who were very serious, and (f) showed any sort of family grouping. For her last question, Ms. Pratt asked: “Pick one picture that you are not too sure about and write what you think the artist is trying to show. You are going to explain what the artist is trying to communicate. This is your personal opinion.” She gave students ample wait-time to respond to each question, but at the overall conclusion she led the students on a lively debate through their answers. She openly welcomed conflicting viewpoints, as long as the students supported their opinions with specific criteria or evidence from the images. “Does anyone want to challenge that?” Ms. Pratt would often ask while constantly reinforcing that there was always more than one right answer. Several times during the lesson, students were practically jumping out of their seats with enthusiasm in order to express their opinion. At the end of the lesson, some students simply didn’t want the activity to come to an end. “One more! One more!” they pleaded.

The next class to arrive for art on that same day was another intermediate multi-age group. This multi-age house was known as the Scholarly Squires. This particular pod from the Scholarly Squires happened to feature many ESE students as part of Rexrode Elementary’s inclusion program. In this instance, Ms. Pratt made small adaptations to the lesson in order to account for the apparent differences in developmental levels from the Excalibur class. The class still toured the museum first, but the activity afterward omitted the written reflection exercise and focused entirely on a verbal discussion. The questions were simplified somewhat so that Ms. Pratt could lead them step by step with questions of greater specificity to more fully formed conclusions.

“Is there a picture that makes you wonder what’s going on?” asked Ms. Pratt.

“Number seven!” answered a student as he pointed to an image of a woman rendered by Picasso.
“Yes, it’s a little more abstract,” responded Ms. Pratt.

“Is she crying?” asked a student who noticed the angular droplet of water near the woman’s face.

“No, she’s blowing her nose,” argued a student pointing at the edgy-looking handkerchief in the woman’s hand.

Later, Ms. Pratt switched gears and directed the students’ attention to a new question. “What pictures show people who look like they are feeling something?”

A girl raised her hand and waited for Ms. Pratt to call on her. “Number 6! The one with the guitar!”

“Is he sad?” asked Ms. Pratt.

“No. He’s happy!”

And in this manner, Ms. Pratt verbally led the students, step by step, into deeper descriptions and interpretations of each image. Her questions did not start off with higher order inquiries nor did she ask the students to write anything down. I also noticed that she followed her instincts and let the discussion run to its natural conclusion instead of pushing the criticism activity to last the entire duration of class time. For the remainder of the class session she allowed the students to continue to work on some of their ongoing projects. The art criticism activity was still successful and the students were still enthusiastic, but Ms. Pratt also knew what they could handle and made the appropriate adjustments.

A day later, I saw Ms. Pratt take one more approach to the art criticism activity with one of her primary classes from the multi-age house known as the Knights of the Round Table. In this case, Ms. Pratt gathered the much smaller children on her carpet first and read them a picture book entitled, *Today I Feel Silly & Other Moods That Make My Day* (Curtis, 1998). The book playfully details the many mood swings, feelings, and emotions of a little girl as she goes about a typical day of childhood trials, tribulations, and triumphs. Ms. Pratt would stop from time to time to see if the students could guess the feelings that were displayed on the little girl’s face on many of the pages. The students were very engaged and didn’t miss a detail. “Look,” said one girl as she sat up on her knees, “even the cat has a sad face!”

Only after reading and discussing the book together did Ms. Pratt allow the students to tour her art museum. Once the students had viewed all of the images, they were asked to return to their seats at the large tables. After a few warm-up questions to get the students thinking, Ms.
Pratt guided the multi-age class in a discussion that led them to realize that the art historical prints showed a variety of moods and feelings just like the picture book. Sticking to a verbal rather than a written approach, Ms. Pratt asked the students to name the moods that they found in the artwork in her classroom museum. Ms. Pratt had effectively used a children’s storybook to make sure that her students were familiar with a variety of feelings and emotions and could identify them before having the class tour her museum. This developmental adaptation set both her and her students up for a successful lesson. Once again, Ms. Pratt let the discussion come to its natural conclusion and used the remainder of class time to have the students begin a small drawing that showed a face displaying an emotion or mood that they found in one of the art historical images.

Ms. Pratt was in effect addressing a wide variety of developmental ranges with just one lesson. She did this frequently during my observations. Many times she was using similar topics or concepts between her K-1 groups and her 1-2 groups, for instance. She would subtly scale the lesson up or down to meet the developmental needs of the students in each multi-age class. Many times I would be unaware, at first, whether Ms. Pratt was teaching a K-1 group or a 1-2 group and then I would notice a subtle difference in how Ms. Pratt introduced the lesson or had the students approach the art project. Since the philosophies of multi-age education incorporate the use of developmentally appropriate instruction (Kasten & Lolli, 1998), it seems reasonable that art educators could also adapt their planned projects to reach many levels. As one survey respondent put it: “I can tell if they can handle a project, so I either teach up to their level or I teach down depending on what I feel they can handle.”

But perhaps Ms. Pratt phrased it best when she said, “You can reach more than just one grade with a lesson. You can always reach multiple grades with most lessons. But you have to pick things that are appropriate.”

**The Impact of Flexible Regrouping**

According to the survey data, there were some hidden patterns that suggested the use of flexible regrouping by teams of multi-age homeroom teachers could result in inconsistent art rosters and possible frustrations for multi-age art educators. I wanted to explore this issue further with Ms. Pratt in our interviews. I was particularly curious about flexible regrouping now that I was aware of the large size of many of Rexrode’s multi-age houses and how these pods had to be split up between two art teachers because of their large size. If the creation of inconsistent
rosters were a problem, I wondered if that problem was exacerbated when students were bounced from one art teacher to another.

“I went back and looked at your survey,” I began, “and there was a response where you talked about how the multi-age teams flexibly regroup their students and that this could affect the art room roster. Could you describe how this grouping may or may not affect how you organize and teach your art lessons and does it affect your planning with Ms. Kahan, the other art teacher?”

“Well it doesn’t really affect Ms. Kahan and my teaching per se, because we’re pretty much on the same track, maybe a little bit ahead or behind each other. We’re doing the same topic, pretty much at the same time. So if a child moves from one to the other room, they might be doing a different project but it’s still the same idea. We just try to catch them up in whatever is appropriate.”

“As far as the children moving,” continued Ms. Pratt, “they do move, especially at the end of quarters. You’ll have a lot of kids who’ll move to different classes. Moving up, moving down, wherever their needs are most suited. So we just have to be on our toes and be ready for those new kids. Some teachers are very good about letting us know if they have a new student or transfer students. Some don’t, so then we have to go and find their artwork from the other class or from the other art teacher, or whatever, and that’s cumbersome. But we deal with it. It’s not really that big a deal and it’s for the kids.”

“It sounds like the regrouping often occurs at the end of a quarter because they kind of reassess where the students are,” I surmised.

“Right. They need to have them long enough that they can really assess them validly, to see if they’re in the correct placement. Especially with the kids who tend to be lower. Those are the kinds of kids that get moved more often. Maybe they need more work with phonics, math, addition, or whatever and they’ll go to whichever teacher is focusing on that more and then transfer them. And we get them however they are grouped before they come to specials. So we just have to deal with it the way they come.”

“Okay…sure…sure.” I was still trying to figure this out in my head. “And when that regrouping occurs and new kids come with a different teacher from the same house, like a teacher within the pod of the Scholarly Squires… It sounds to me that when they come to your
classroom that, from your point of view, it’s mainly about putting their artwork in a new place, maybe giving them a new seat, but they are already doing the same project?”

“They’re pretty much doing similar projects,” explained Ms. Pratt. “If there is a significant change its when maybe a fifth grader gets moved into our primarily third and fourth grade multi-age class, where they’re doing something totally off-the-wall that these third and fourth graders don’t even know about. For instance, the classroom masks [a project I had observed her highest developmental groups working on]. Then I have to really work. I have to be kind of sly the way I work that in because I don’t want the fifth graders to feel, you know, uncomfortable. But then I don’t want the third and fourth graders to say, ‘Oh, when do we get to do that?’ It takes a little finesse to make those situations work. And over time you develop a little, you know, a repertoire of how to deal with situations like that when there is a significant difference in what the work is from class to class.”

“And the plaster masks would be the example?” I asked.

“That’s one of the strongest examples,” nodded Ms. Pratt in affirmation.

“And then if they…” as I continued to stumble with both my words and the concepts, “because Ms. Kahan, the other art teacher, teaches part of the Scholarly Squires and… as you mentioned… sometimes there could be a student flip-flopped from Ms. Kahan’s art classroom to yours. But it sounds like that hasn’t been too much of an issue?”

“No, we work pretty well together. And like I said, we’re fairly well in sync. If a child is done early on something that we’re just starting, then I come up with something else for them to work on.”

The flexible regrouping of students from multi-age pod to multi-age pod within the same larger multi-age house did result in inconsistent art rosters at Rexrode Elementary. The switching of students generally occurred at the end of the quarter, or nine-week grading period, when multi-age homeroom teachers tended to reassess their students’ changing developmental needs in terms of upcoming skill sets and the progress of each individual child. Although students were moved from pod to pod, and sometimes even from art teacher to art teacher, this movement did not seem to be too bothersome from Ms. Pratt’s perspective. She coped well with this flexible regrouping because of the way in which she had organized her art lessons around general developmental levels, because of her coordination of topics with Ms. Kahan, and because her teaching experience had provided her with a repertoire of strategies to finesse over situations
where flexible regrouping did create minor obstacles. Of these strategies, I will address the importance of the organizational structure of Ms. Pratt’s art classes first because of its universal relevance. Not every multi-age art teacher may find themselves working with a second art teacher, and those that do may not have the same working relationship as experienced by Ms. Pratt and Ms. Kahan. By the same token, not all multi-age art teachers may have Ms. Pratt’s full bag of teaching tricks and experience to use when smoothing over those obstacles that do result from flexible regrouping.

Because Ms. Pratt had organized her art classes around developmental groups instead of single grade levels, she had established a structure that had “‘threes and fours’ . . . generally doing the same thing and ‘fours and fives’ . . . usually doing the same thing.” With each developmental group concentrating on the same project across the school, the minor shifts in art rosters caused few, if any, disturbances. A student from King Arthur’s Court who was moved from one pod to another would, in most cases, arrive to art class with a different homeroom teacher and on a different day of the week, but would still find him or herself working on the same art project. All Ms. Pratt had to do was assign the student a new seat and, perhaps, show the student a different location to store his or her artwork. With those two minor tasks out of the way, the flexibly regrouped student could resume his or her ongoing art project without losing much, if any, continuity in the ongoing art lesson. Of course if the flexible regrouping of students occurred more frequently or involved large numbers of students, the situation would involve more of the art teacher’s time in divvying up new student seats. But as Ms. Pratt pointed out: “It’s for the kids.”

The large size of the multi-age houses at Rexrode Elementary and the establishment of common planning times for the multi-age homeroom teachers, necessitated that the largest of houses be split up between Ms. Pratt and Ms. Kahan. This also created the possibility of students to be flexibly regrouped from art teacher to art teacher. Due to the excellent ability of Ms. Pratt and Ms. Kahan to coordinate their topics together, the flexible regrouping of students between art teachers also did not have a significant negative impact at Rexrode Elementary. Of course not every multi-age school will have two art teachers. Those schools that do have multiple art teachers might not always find that the two teachers have the same “in sync” working relationship as Ms. Pratt and Ms. Kahan, although such positive working relationships seem to be worth striving for. Ms. Kahan had been assigned to Rexrode Elementary as an itinerant art
teacher who worked there four days a week. This allowed her and Ms. Pratt lots of time to work together and coordinate their lessons. Some itinerants may only be assigned to a school site for a day or two a week, making such coordination less feasible. Multi-age schools with multiple art teachers and smaller multi-age houses may find it beneficial to assign entire nongraded houses to one art teacher as a way to avoid the potential pitfalls of flexible regrouping from art teacher to art teacher. The size of the multi-age classes at Rexrode Elementary necessitated that Ms. Pratt and Ms. Kahan divide classes. The two art teachers used their positive relationship and professional experience to create a coordinated program that was successful in dealing with flexible grouping.

In rare cases at Rexrode Elementary, a student or two was flexibly regrouped across the developmental divisions established by Ms. Pratt’s structure for organizing art lessons. Using Ms. Pratt’s plaster mask example as a specific case, a student from a fourth and fifth grade developmental group who was making a plaster mask, may be transferred down to the group Ms. Pratt had established as a third and fourth grade developmental group that was not making plaster masks. Such a switch would create inconsistencies in Ms. Pratt’s art roster and would also hold the potential for breaking the continuity of art lessons. Ms. Pratt used her professional experience, rapport with students, and existing teaching repertoire to smooth over these rare road bumps when they did occur. In today’s mobile society, art teachers have new students join their classes mid-year on a regular basis and have to deal with similar circumstances even in traditional graded classes.

In cases unlike Rexrode Elementary, where students were more frequently regrouped across three grade levels rather than two, art teachers may once again consider widening their developmental groupings to a three year span rather than a two year developmental grouping. When a student is transferred or flexibly regrouped anywhere among the pods of a three year multi-age house, he or she will still be working on the same project or topic and should lose little continuity in the art lesson. Within these larger developmental groupings, lessons can be scaled up or down to meet the needs of individual classes or individual students. I will again note, however, that any widening in a developmental span could conceivably inch the art teacher closer to the gray area between the perceived advantages of scaffolding and the disadvantages that occur when developmental levels are perceived to be too great (see Figure 13). This gray area continues to require further attention.
My last analytical thoughts on flexible grouping are focused on the multi-age homeroom teachers themselves, rather than the multi-age art teachers or the art curriculum. The first thought concerns the effective communication between the multi-age homeroom teachers and the special area teachers at multi-age school sites. Ms. Pratt herself said: “Some teachers are very good about letting us know if they have a new student or transfer students. Some don’t so then we have to go and find their artwork from the other class or from the other art teacher, or whatever, and that’s cumbersome.” In consideration of this passage, it seems wise to suggest that the multi-age homeroom teachers should inform the special area teachers of upcoming or new switches in flexibly regrouped rosters as soon as possible, if nothing else, as a matter of professional courtesy and respect.

The second thought is similar in nature and deals with the necessity of flexibly regrouped rosters in art, music, and physical education in general. The use of flexible grouping to meet the changing developmental and interest levels within multi-age classrooms seems to be an asset of the model of instruction (Cushman, 1993), and I am not suggesting that such regroupings should not occur. However, in cases where the multi-age schedule allows it, it seems wise to suggest that multi-age classes could regularly revert back to their original homeroom group of students before taking their students to music, art, or P.E. class. In theory, homeroom groups stay consistent throughout the school year for the sake of taking attendance and other administrative and clerical functions. Homerooms, such as the example provided earlier by the Royal Family, can also be configured in multi-age groups, but ones that are consistent in structure. If multi-age teams of teachers regularly take five or so minutes out of their day to switch back to these consistently arranged homeroom groups before taking their students to special area classes, then art, music, and P.E. teachers would not be burdened with the obstacles of inconsistent rosters and could still experience the advantages that may present themselves in having mixed-age groups in their classrooms.

I am not suggesting that the five or so lost minutes of instructional time is not valuable to multi-age homeroom teachers, but am rather suggesting that such lost time could be sacrificed as a matter of professional courtesy and respect to those who provide priceless educational services to their multi-age students. At one school site where a group of multi-age team teachers sent consistent rosters to their art teacher, the concept of flexible regrouping leading to inconsistent art rosters was eliminated and all teachers felt that such practices were inconceivable (Broome,
Finally, I must point out that not all school schedules are flexible enough to permit this reversion back to consistent homeroom groups before sending multi-age students to special area classes. Multi-age schools sites that have music, art, and P.E. classes of varying lengths or multi-age classes that do not have common planning times may find it unfeasible to switch back to homeroom groups before going to special area classes. Such staggered schedules could result in multi-age classes sitting for long periods of time waiting for the rest of their developmental pod to return from, say, physical education class. All school schedules, multi-age or not, are pliable and tricky structures that should be explored from many angles to determine how they can be arranged in mutually beneficial ways.

The Impact of Looping

To a lesser extent, some survey respondents also indicated that the multi-age practice of looping, or students staying with the same teacher(s) for a period of years (Kasten & Lolli, 1998), could be disadvantageous to the established planning practices of some multi-age art teachers. An example of looping can be provided by the cases presented at Rexrode Elementary School. As mentioned earlier, the Castle Guard is a primary multi-age group made up of students traditionally labeled as kindergarten, first, and second graders. Due to the multi-age practice of looping, an incoming kindergarten student would remain with the Castle Guard teachers for a three-year period until he or she would be ready to move on to an intermediate multi-age house, presumably at the age usually associated with third grade. An example of the frustration that such looping practices can cause multi-age art educators is best expressed by a survey respondent who reported that a disadvantage of multi-age art education was “planning for instruction without repetition of concepts. For example, a primary house of K, 1\textsuperscript{st}, and 2\textsuperscript{nd} cannot repeat a concept for 3 years. So you are constantly revising lessons . . .”

While only two survey respondents directly mentioned looping as having a negative impact, I thought the matter was worth further investigation due to its relevance toward the planning of multi-age art lessons from one year to another. With this in mind, I was interested to see how Ms. Pratt handled the impact of looping on her own instructional practices at Rexrode Elementary School.

“That presents its own challenges in itself,” explained Ms. Pratt. “Because if you’re doing the same thing with third graders every year, you can’t do it the next year because the kids are repeating their instruction, if you do the same thing again. We had to be conscious of that.”
“You had to be aware of repeatability,” I said, “because one student could be with King Arthur’s Court for three years. There is no way you could teach the same lesson again?”

“Right,” said Ms. Pratt. “Well,” she started to clarify, “it could happen if you weren’t conscious of how or where those kids were and what they had done before. So it was a little more difficult to track what they had experiences with or not. And through that process I found that if I do different things for three years, then they get it sometime during that three years. I kind of found my own way through it.”

“So you wouldn’t repeat a certain lesson until a three-year period was up?” I asked.

“Right, until the three-year period is up. But I’m also very conscious of what they’re getting in their three years. So I’ve kind of streamlined it and because I don’t repeat things every year, it works.”

I remembered part of our earlier conversation and said, “So during the week you’re teaching less lessons a week than you might be if you had one for every grade level, but you couldn’t repeat it until maybe a cycle is over?”

“Right,” said Ms. Pratt, “you have to get through a cycle and that’s the adjustment a lot of people have to make, ‘I’m used to doing this every year.’ It doesn’t work anymore so you’ve got to look at it as a three-year process instead of a one-year process.”

“You’re generating fewer lessons a week or a year,” I said in confirmation, “but then you have to wait a two or three-year cycle, or whatever the case may be, to repeat. Okay.”

“The idea is that after we’ve gone through three years, then we have a huge pocket of knowledge and a huge pocket of resources and everything that we can use and not have to reinvent the wheel. So we can reuse those things in three years. And not every teacher teaches everything the same way, so there’s some play in there… some flexibility. And the primary teams all have crates filled with stuff. Then everybody every year puts more stuff in there so then the wheel is invented, you know. And that’s the theory.”

“At the end of the three-year cycle,” I started to ask, “You can go back and draw from those resources that you’ve already created?”

“And if we want to, we can repeat all those lessons or we can throw out the ones that didn’t work and put in some new ones. I’d love to have, you know, a resource box that we can share for art teachers. But I know we only have so much time in our day, so I loan out a lot of materials… give out a lot of ideas.”
The impact of looping on multi-age art education, then, was not as multi-faceted as the issue of flexible regrouping. Quite simply, it seems as if multi-age art educators, just like the multi-age homeroom teachers, would be wise not to repeat exactly the same lesson year after year with the same multi-age group. If the art teacher did try to repeat the same lesson, a kindergarten student in the Castle Guard, for instance, could end up making the exact same art project three years in row. So while multi-age art teachers would likely be generating fewer lessons per year, they could not repeat these lessons for a two or three year cycle, in most cases. That is not to say that certain concepts or skills could not be repeated at all from year to year. Most curricula, whether in art education, general education, multi-age, or otherwise, has a spiraling tendency in which past concepts and skills are revisited as touchstones and building blocks for new concepts and skills. A math teacher who is introducing the concept of division is most certainly also readdressing the concepts of multiplication, addition, and subtraction in a spiraled fashion. In art education, any number of vehicles can be used to introduce certain concepts, skills, or ideas. These vehicles can easily be switched with new ones from time to time.

At the end of the multi-age cycle, the nongraded art instructor would, in theory, have a catalog of lessons to revise, reuse, adapt, or discard. Ms. Pratt, always ready to share knowledge and ideas, envisioned a day when art teachers could compile their three year cycles of lessons into a resource box that could serve as a sort of library for loaning out lesson plans and curricula.

For some art teachers, I suspect this lack of repeatability may not be a major adjustment. Some art teachers naturally prefer to change their lessons from year to year in order to keep things fresh and exciting for their own sake. This may also explain why so few survey respondents reported the multi-age practice of looping as having a negative impact. On the other hand, it’s also likely that there are some art teachers who have been repeating preferred lessons for year after year. For those teachers, the impact of looping is likely to loom large, as is indicated by the survey respondent at the opening of this section.

Looping and long term goals. Interestingly enough, the multi-age concept of looping also gave Ms. Pratt a fresh perspective on her approach to meeting the State’s reigning system of standardized teaching objectives in the visual arts as established by Florida’s Sunshine State Standards and Grade Level Benchmarks (YOUR Florida Department of Education, 2005).
By 1996, the Department of Education for the State of Florida had adopted its own set of teaching objectives, known as the *Sunshine State Standards*. In the subject of the visual arts, the teaching standards established curricular objectives in five content areas including (a) skills and techniques, (b) creation and communication, (c) cultural and historical communication, (d) aesthetic and critical analysis, and (e) applications to life. The initial listing of standards seemed to, from almost any perspective, fit well with multi-age frameworks since these five content areas contained benchmarks that were divided into two broad multi-grade categories: pre-kindergarten to second grade, and third to fifth grade. “However, as Florida moves toward greater accountability for student achievement at each grade level, the *Sunshine State Standards* have been further defined . . . to include *Grade Level Expectations*” (YOUR Florida Department of Education, 2005, p. 1). Currently there are *Grade Level Expectations* in the subject area of the visual arts in all grades from pre-kindergarten to the 12th grade, yet no official system of accountability has, at the time of this writing, been adopted to establish students’ attainment of these grade-specific standards.

Surprisingly enough, the subjects of multi-age looping and Florida’s *Grade Level Expectations* came together in a positive light during my conversations with Alice Pratt. This development may seem counter-intuitive since multi-age models of instruction are often perceived to have a poor fit with accountability measures tied to specific grade levels (Cushman, 1993). Ms. Pratt explained her perspective one day when we were on the subject of her visual arts curricula at Rexrode Elementary School.

“Well, it’s multi-faceted,” began Ms. Pratt. “First of all, we have to go by the *Sunshine State Standards* which are set pretty much in stone and for the most part, they’re pretty good. They offer a broad range of things that should be covered. Something that they have just added lately is the benchmarks [*Grade Level Expectations*] and that’s thrown another loop our way as far as, okay, now we need to change how we’re doing things so that we make sure that these kids are getting these skills. It’s more concrete than it used to be. It used to be more global and it was kind of up to the teacher, how and what they did. So it’s a little more concrete. These are a little more specific. They are K, 1, and 2. But there is a lot of overlapping too. Obviously, you might introduce a very simple printing technique in kindergarten. You would do a higher level by the time you’re in second grade. Our district also is very progressive in the way they interpret and apply the *State Standards* and more increasingly the benchmarks.”
“Could you describe how teaching art to multi-age classes may or may not affect an art teacher’s ability to meet those Standards or those benchmarks? How do you feel about it?” I asked.

“In my opinion, you have to be conscious of where you’ve been and where you’re going. And, again, certain principals are going to be really tracking you. From my point of view, we’re pretty empowered here. She [the principal] knows we have a good staff and she trusts that we’re doing what we are supposed to be doing. But sometimes I feel… My God, I don’t have time to do all of this stuff… and I don’t . . . It has a negative impact on my ability to do the Standards and meet all those benchmarks. So I try to look at it more than just a one-year thing. I’ve got to get that sometime within two or three years.”

“So does it help you to see it in terms of a three-year cycle or…”

“Absolutely! Yes… yes…,” Ms. Pratt said with conviction. “For me, it takes some of the pressure off because a lot of the benchmarks from kindergarten, first, and second overlap. It might just be on a different level. So if you’re smart about it, you find your way through and make it work. And that’s a lot of it right there!”

Teachers lead busy lives. And art teachers at the elementary level see hundreds of students every week. From my own experiences as a former public school art teacher and from observing art education student teachers in the State of Florida, I know that most elementary art teachers only see each class one day a week for approximately half an hour to an hour a session (Ms. Pratt had 40 minute sessions). The school calendar is typically broken down into four quarters of nine-week experiences totaling 180 school days. At best, an elementary art teacher in Florida sees one specific grade level class for a total of 36 hours of instructional time in a school year (that is of course assuming that no time is needed for clean-up, no time is lost for holidays, field trips, special programs, and that the art teacher actually has an hour long class). In the best of all possible schedules, the State of Florida expects their public school art teachers to meet a total of 40 Grade Level Expectations with first graders in a total of 36 hours or less of art instruction (YOUR Florida Department of Art Education, 2005). Ms. Pratt’s schedule, under perfect conditions when not a single minute was lost during 36 school weeks, would allow her to see a traditional grade level class for a total of 24 hours in a school year. Using those figures instead, the State of Florida insists that Ms. Pratt and other art teachers with her schedule meet a total of 44 Grade Level Expectations with their fifth grade students in a total of 24 hours.
I am not suggesting that accountability is a bad thing or that more than one grade level benchmark can’t be met in one session; in fact they can. I am merely suggesting that public school elementary art teachers, like all teachers, are extremely busy and have enormous amounts of pressure and responsibility put upon their shoulders. The multi-age framework helped Ms. Pratt to see the *Grade Level Expectations* more holistically and see how many of those *Expectations* overlapped in some way or another from grade level to grade level. The multi-age strategy of looping allowed her to escape the view of each school year as a race to the finish line in hopes of covering each *Grade Level Expectation* along the way. Looping allowed her to see a three-year cycle in which those many overlapping benchmarks could be attained at various levels as her students continually progressed toward long term goals.

**Thematic Integration and the Multi-age Art Show**

I had just stepped back on the grounds at Rexrode Elementary School once again, but this time something was different. It was evening and excitement was in the air! Not the everyday excitement of parents walking their children to school, but the excitement of children *pulling their parents* to school! It was the night of the Rexrode Elementary School’s annual art show, ice cream social, and book fair (see Figure16). And the kids and parents were out in full force!

As I worked my way toward the school cafeteria, where the art show was held, I couldn’t help but notice that there were kids and parents crawling everywhere! I saw parents being pulled into the media center to see the book fair, families coming out of the book fair with new purchases, families sitting on benches, children with ice cream covered faces, and even dads who were busy supervising some kids who stole an opportunity to climb on playground equipment. This was a family event that certainly took some team planning between a number of school personnel and volunteers!

I rounded the corner and swung open the door that led to the cafeteria. Now this place was really buzzing like a beehive! To my right were more children (with their parents safely in tow behind them) scrambling around large displays of artwork. “Come see mine! It’s over here!” To my left were a few tables remaining from lunch time and a line for the parents and students to get their ice cream, which was receiving considerable attention too. I also saw Ms. Pratt, Ms. Kahan, and the school’s principal busy helping students and chatting with parents near the displays. My attention, however, was devoted to the work in the art show.
The artwork was arranged neatly in a variety of formats. Some of the artwork was attached to sturdy display boards; some of it was hung and neatly displayed on the walls or colorful bulletin board paper; some was displayed in professional-looking glass cases; some, usually the three-dimensional work, was arranged on display tables. But all of the work was arranged by multi-age house and each display area had a bold sign over it letting everyone know that this artwork was made by the Resourceful Sorcerers, or the Knowledgeable Knights, and so on. And each piece of artwork had received a red satin-finished ribbon attached to it that proudly proclaimed in gold letters: “My Best Art Work: R.E.S [Rexrode Elementary School] Art Show 2006.” Every child in the school had one piece of work on exhibit and each child was asked to select his or her own masterpiece of the year for display.

There were so many different projects on display! I recognized the Fruity Face art project based on Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s work right away. And over there were some of the mask projects that I had observed and discussed with Ms. Pratt earlier. But, overall, I was seeing artwork that was new to me and had been made throughout the whole school year! There were illustrated letters, curving ceramic animals, collaged fish bowls, gadget prints, symmetrical
shields, torn paper mosaics of fruit bowls, ceramic pinch pots, black glue contour drawings of underwater scenes, painted snow scenes, and so much more!

One set of displays, in particular, really caught my attention. Arranged neatly on a display table with all of the trimmings was a feast of ceramic food! The display was complete with tablecloths, plates, bowls, and even some utensils (see Figure 17). In the center of each display was a bold placard that proudly announced which multi-age house of chiefs had prepared these artistic entrees. The signs cleverly stated: *King Arthur’s Cuisine*, the *Scholarly Squire Supper*, *Excalibur’s Entrees*, and the *Royal Family Feast*. Each display included a wide variety of ceramic food including pizza, apples, bananas, grapes, hamburgers, and lots and lots of desserts. As I admired the students’ artwork, my mind raced back to my very first classroom observation at Rexrode Elementary School. I could hear Ms. Pratt’s words from that day in my head: “You guys studied healthy eating earlier in the year, so that’s the tie-in.” I wondered if the ceramic food display in front of me also had a tie-in to the healthy eating unit Ms. Pratt had mentioned. And then I wondered if other art projects on display at the Rexrode Elementary exhibit also held conceptual connections to themes studied throughout the school.

*Figure 17.* Display of ceramic food items at Rexrode Elementary School’s annual multi-age art show.
Just then a student darted past me with a piece of artwork in both hands. “I got it!” she was calling to someone over in the ice cream line. I just remembered that Ms. Pratt had told her students that they could remove their own artwork from the display boards and take it home after touring the museum. “Well,” I said to myself, “you had better start snapping some pictures and taking some fieldnotes if you want to ask Ms. Pratt about all of these projects and the use of thematic integration. If I wait too long, the whole show will be gone before I know it.”

The next time that I visited Ms. Pratt, we were well into the subject of thematic integration before we even sat down for an interview. Ms. Pratt had started by explaining to me how her school district was actually encouraging teachers to use thematic instruction and encouraging their teachers to consider multi-age grouping. The district had even created suggested clusters of themes that were created to last over a three-year span. The three-year cycle of themes matched well with both the multi-grade groupings of the Sunshine State Standards (YOUR Florida Department of Education, 2005) and the three-year looping cycles of the multi-age houses and pods at Rexrode Elementary School. The suggested clusters of themes for this particular school year centered on the following big ideas and guiding questions: (a) Why do people work? (b) How do living things interact with their environment? (c) Why is it important to make contributions to my community? (d) How is Florida unique? (e) How do the processes that shape the Earth affect our lives? (f) Why should I make healthy choices? Ms. Pratt had also indicated that the multi-age teachers at Rexrode Elementary School tended to follow the suggested clusters of themes and essential questions as well.

“We were talking about your curricula that you teach here,” I began as I picked up the threads from our earlier conversation, “and how the district was encouraging the use of themes again and to integrate.”

“On a site based level,” Ms. Pratt started to explain, “the special areas are trying to do at least one integration with the classroom subjects at least once each quarter. That’s kind of the goal. That’s the goal and one which I think is reasonable. Sometimes it’s harder to integrate because of just the subject, it just doesn’t…”

“Depends on the theme?”

“Yes,” affirmed Ms. Pratt “depends on the theme. It just doesn’t work that well. So, then in that case I tend to do more integration in the themes that do blend together better. You can’t do everything they’re doing all the time. We have our own, and this is really important, we have
our own curriculum that we are supposed to accomplish. We have our own benchmarks we’re supposed to meet. And if you’re smart, we can figure out ways to do both at the same time.”

This seemed like the perfect opportunity to address some of the artwork that I had seen at the school art exhibit. “I was wondering if you could describe which of the projects that I saw had connections to the school-wide themes and topics that you’ve shown me.”

“Alright,” agreed Ms. Pratt. “For primary we connected several times throughout the year. One of the first things we did was connecting with reading, which is our school’s major school wide goal. All of us are working on vocabulary development and things. So first off with primary, I had them pick a letter. The letter of their name or something and then draw things in the background that started with the same letter as their name. So that was our initial way to start off before we got into our themes. Because this was our tenth birthday this year [of the opening of Rexrode Elementary School], we focused a lot on the medieval theme. Children made shields and castle pictures and different things that were related to our theme. That was more intermediate than primary.”

“The medieval theme relates to your mascot?” I asked.

“That’s our mascot. Our whole setting for our school is all set in medieval renaissance times,” replied Ms. Pratt. “Our very first year I was the coordinator for our first renaissance festival. And we haven’t done it in ten years, so we thought it was appropriate to have it for our tenth birthday. So a lot of the things we did in primary and in intermediate, particularly intermediate, had to do with that theme. We taught them about illumination and lettering and that was something that was very profound back in that period of time.”

“We had them also tie in the environment to that.” Ms. Pratt was now referring to the district’s suggested theme: *How do living things interact with their environment?* “They were studying about the environment and animals and living things… how they would interrelate with their environment. So the way I took this was to have the kids choose a letter that started the name of an animal. And then also show in their large picture, the environment that they lived in and other things you might find in their environment. So it became a complete story. They could actually write, you know, a paper about their animal… where they’re found… their habitats… where they lived. And that was my way of tying together many strands of thinking into one that related to environment plus also to the whole medieval theme of illustrated letters that we found. So it had a multi-layered purpose there.”
“Yeah, it seems like you connected to the Renaissance Fair and connected to the county theme and with reading and so on,” I surmised.

“To me it’s fun to make the process look multi-layered because then you’re covering more bases. You only see them once a week and so I try to make my lessons powerful so they touch on a few different themes. In the primary classes we also studied healthy eating and healthy choices and foods that are good for you.” Ms. Pratt was describing the county’s suggested theme: Why should I make healthy choices? “The way that we tied into that was to have the kids do paintings of fruit bowls. We also studied Arcimboldo’s fruity faces, Summer portrait. This is from about 500 years ago and they learned a little art history with that. And how he used the summer fruit to create the portrait. Then they had to create their own portrait using fruits and vegetables and I encouraged them to do this at home on the countertop with real fruits and vegetables.”

“Oh yeah,” I said. “I heard you do that with one class.”

“Some of the students have come back and said, ‘My mom let me do it and it was so fun!’ And now they go through the grocery store saying, ‘Oh that cucumber would make a great nose!’ You know, so it taught them new words too. They didn’t know what an avocado was or different kinds of vegetables. So they learned some new vocabulary as well, which again is something we were really pushing hard… is to raise the level of vocabulary and development within our students.”

“For the intermediate students relating to that theme,” continued Ms. Pratt, “all the specialists, we focused on healthy eating and choices in a variety of ways. We had our Field Day all centered around healthy eating. So the P.E. department came up with different games that related to choices of foods and things. I manned the healthy snack foods. They had all kinds of activities. And in the art room, with the older children, we had them create food. We studied pop art, which is a natural right there. Andy Warhol’s tomato soup cans and Claes Oldenburg’s different food sculptures, so that was a natural tie in for us. That was very easy for us to do and the kids absolutely loved that project. They created all different kinds of food, healthy and unhealthy, and it culminated at the art show where you had tables set like you were entering a cafeteria or at a dining room or something. And the food was out there on the tables kind of grouped by subjects.”

“I loved it,” I said as I started to giggle. “I remember Excalibur’s Entrees!”
“Let’s see, what am I missing?” Ms. Pratt paused to think of more of the past year’s art projects. She remembered the county suggested cluster that concentrated on Florida’s uniqueness and started again. “Okay, in the spring we talked about Florida and the special area teachers got together and we created some events that had to do with the things that we see in Florida, mainly fish. Our peninsula is surrounded by all this water life and also natural springs. We have Homosassa Springs and manatees. All of this stuff is priceless in Florida and the water depletion that we are experiencing… So all the kids are very aware of Florida and its water resources, which is a really wonderful thing. The Music Department got a “Go Fish” musical performance that they put together for the parents. And it was all about different kinds of fish interrelated to each other… how they get along with each other and their environment. And it was really an analogy for people and how they live in their world. And then for the Art Department, of course, we had lots of fish kinds of projects that go on.”

“I saw some fish.” I remembered them from the art show. “It looked like they were in fish bowls and some looked like they were outlined with glue.”

“Black glue, yeah, colored with pastels. And really Ms. Kahan did more of that. She had more time in her schedule, but again, we talked things through. She just had more time to do that than I did.”

“She also mentioned that she helped with the stage design for the “Go Fish” musical program,” I said.

“Right,” confirmed Ms. Pratt. “Yes, and I had one particular class that stayed many hours and created the three dimensional fish that were all hung above the curtain (see Figure 18). I worked with small groups that had to come up with a little team and what they were going to do. They worked together on that and I gave up a lot of my planning time to do that. So, that was another part of it… small groups. But I do try to, as much as I can, tie in with what naturally lends itself to the themes or wheels the school is supposed to follow.”

“In a multi-age school in a different county where they didn’t have a county theme,” I started to wonder, “do you think it would be helpful for the school to create their own themes ahead of time and provide that information to everybody? What’s your thought on that?”

“Absolutely. I think the hazard of not having a long-term plan is that there’s not a structure in place. Back in the day,” Ms. Pratt started to laugh, “I would have elementary teachers come up and say, ‘Oh, we’re learning about dinosaurs. Can you do dinosaurs?’ It’s
like, don’t bring your class and tell me to do something that day. You know, that’s not respectful. [Now] we don’t have teachers knocking on our door all the time saying, you know, ‘Can you do this?’”

“So having a list of themes helps you for long-term planning and it helps people to be on the same page,” I said. “I mean, it would almost prevent the drop-ins: ‘Hey, we’re working on butterflies…’” But now I’m laughing too as only a couple of art teachers could that have shared this experience.

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**Figure 18.** Student created stage design for “*Go Fish*” at Rexrode Elementary. This art activity had connections to county suggested themes and interdisciplinary connections with the Music Department.

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Overall, the integration of themes, topics, skills, and other concepts truly happened on a regular basis at Rexrode Elementary and in Ms. Pratt’s art program. Most often these connections seemed to be related to the themes that were suggested by the school district’s clusters of guiding questions and that were used by the multi-age homeroom teachers. The county’s suggested concepts of *healthy choices*, *Florida’s uniqueness*, and *the interaction of living things with their environments* were all addressed by Rexrode Elementary’s art teachers on
varying levels. Some of these themes were truly interdisciplinary as the school’s music teachers seemed to have initiated much of the integration related to the “Go Fish” program and the physical education instructors played an important role in the Healthy Choices Field Day. At other times, the themes utilized by the art teachers were initiated at the school level, rather than by the county’s suggested clusters. This most certainly was the case of Rexrode Elementary’s 10th anniversary Renaissance Fair and the art activities that revolved around this celebration. Some of the integration also connected to subject area skills such as reading and vocabulary, but these skills were usually embedded within a larger thematic project.

Ms. Pratt wisely chose those themes and topics that seemed to have the strongest and most relevant connections to the visual arts and integrated those ideas into the art curriculum on her own accord. If a theme or topic did not seem to have strong connections to the arts, Ms. Pratt did not force the issue where such connections did not seem to naturally occur. Having a list of themes ahead of time allowed Ms. Pratt to set long-term goals and pick and choose which themes and topics that seemed most relevant. The point is not so much that school districts have to create a list of suggested themes for all of their teachers to follow, because, in fact, they don’t. While such suggested themes may be helpful, many multi-age homeroom teachers may prefer to create their own themes or involve their students in selecting themes of current and local interest. The point is that the timely dissemination of the themes that multi-age houses plan to study for each year would help the art teacher in long term planning and could actually result in more meaningful interdisciplinary connections between those themes and the arts.

Serig’s (1995) approach to multi-age art education also utilized the integration of nongraded homeroom themes when he felt that such connections were evident and relevant to the study of the visual arts. In the end, he concluded that an open-ended, thematic approach to multi-age art education allowed his art students to explore such themes at their own pace and at their own developmental and readiness levels. During my observations at Rexrode Elementary, I did not see Ms. Pratt use a theme-based lesson that did not allow students to approach a task or project at their own developmental level. I did not observe the use of a theme-based lesson that presented Ms. Pratt difficulties in terms of dealing with differing developmental levels, although admittedly, the age spans sent to Ms. Pratt’s room were sometimes narrow.

Considering my observations and the conclusions of Serig (1995), I was curious to see what Alice Pratt had concluded about thematic integration. “I think it empowers me,” she said.
“And anybody who doesn’t see it that way, I think they’re not looking at the whole thing. It makes what I’m doing that much more powerful, because I’m contributing. They are bringing things here that we can expand upon. I’m working on that side of the brain that’s problem solving, and it’s not just the facts. It’s taking what they’re learning in the classroom and sending it up a whole other level and to be personally expressive. It’s just a beautiful thing! And it’s something that I can make happen here that doesn’t happen other places. So the multi-age thing is just bringing that many more opinions, and thoughts at one time. And I think it’s a beautiful thing. I like it! I like it.”

Peer Assistance and Scaffolding Techniques

It’s the afternoon now at Rexrode Elementary School and Ms. Pratt has the Castle Guard group down on her carpet in the center of the floor listening to her instructions. The Castle Guard is made up of kindergarten, first, and second graders and they are giving Ms. Pratt their full attention.

“Today we are going to pick up something that we started a while ago and we never got around to finishing,” says Ms. Pratt.

“What about the kites?” asks an excited little boy as he bounces up and down in one spot.

“If you get finished you can work on the kite. So we will kind of be doing two things today.” With that, Ms. Pratt doesn’t miss a beat and launches into a review of concepts that the Castle Guard had learned a few sessions ago. She pulls out a large glossy color wheel and begins to have the students identify warm and cool colors. Apparently this particular pod from the Castle Guard has already created a sheet of blended warm colors with watercolor paints in a previous art lesson. “Today we’re going to do another like it,” explains Ms. Pratt, “but it’s not going to be a picture of anything, because it’s abstract. Today we’re going to do one of the cool colors.”

I’ve already observed Ms. Pratt teach a similar lesson with some other students in a slightly different developmental grouping. In those other cases, the students took both their completed warm and cool color paintings and, when they were dry, combined the two paintings together as a weaving assignment. However, now that I was used to Ms. Pratt’s ability to scale lessons up and down to meet differing developmental levels, I wasn’t going to make any assumptions that this was the direction she would be heading with this particular group. But for
the time being she was reminding the students how to properly use their brushes and watercolor trays. She also reviews some management issues such as the use of smocks to keep the students’ clothes nice and clean and how to carefully carry their wet paintings to the huge drying rack in the back of the room. “Carry your painting like-a-de- pizza pie,” she says in faux Italian accent as she demonstrates.

The Castle Guard is eating it up and one boy says, “Do the funny voice again! How do you do it?”

But before you know it, the directions are over and the kids are off to get their materials and smocks, which are really huge sheets of heavy wallpaper samples with a hole cut out in the center. The Castle Guard may be one of the younger multi-age groups, but they know the routine well. They get the smocks and slip their heads through the hole in the center. The smocks hang down both in the front and the back and now they remind me more of French musketeers than Castle Guardsmen.

Things are really getting started now and, to me, it looks like a typical art class with lots of activity and art making in all corners of the spacious room. Ms. Pratt is circulating and assisting and making her rounds to see how everyone is doing. Most of the students are painting away and actually discussing the effects of mixing cool colors together in an abstract wash. One boy, Lee, dashes through his painting rather quickly and is off to the drying rack (carrying it like a pizza pie) while some girls at his table continue to paint and discuss the wonders of watercolor.

“Look at my pretty water,” says one girl as she cleans her brush in a water cup.

“Guys, you should mix the blue with the purple!” says another. “Look how it comes out!” Her table partners crane their necks and stretch across their large group table to take a look.

Meanwhile, Lee has come back to their table and he’s already finishing up his paper kite too. The final step is to attach a set of colorful streamers as the kite’s tail and Lee is already on his way for the stapler. Ms. Pratt is on the other side of the room working with a small group of two or three girls who have also finished their paintings and have moved on to the paper kites.

The girls sitting nearest me are still engrossed in their work, experimenting, and learning from each other as they continue to layer cool colors upon their papers. “If you want dark blue, you should do this,” one girl says to the other one right next to her.
But now Lee is up out of his seat. He has successfully attached his streamers to the back of his kite and he wants to see if they really work. There’s no better way to give it a try than taking your kite for a little jaunt back and forth in front of your table. One thing is for sure, his streamers certainly work well!

Ms. Pratt is still on the other side of the room and her head whirls around as if it were on a swivel. “Lee,” she calls out in a way to get his attention, but not in a harsh or negative tone. Lee stops dead in his tracks, his face freezes, and he looks up. The tails of his kite flutter for a moment longer before coming to a rest too.

“Lee, why don’t you help some of your friends who need help stapling,” says Ms. Pratt. She nods with her head to one of several girls clustered around her. “I know that you already know how to do this. She could use some help.”

Lee’s frozen face cracks and now he’s grinning from ear to ear. He puts his kite down on his chair and there’s a bounce in his step as he trots off to lend a hand. He’s in charge now in this neck of the art room, and Ms. Pratt works her way out of the crowd she had been surrounded by for the past minute or so. She heads off to another area of the room to see what’s going on.

Suddenly a tiny blonde girl from the Alligator table is in the action too. She has been hunched over her kite for a while, it seems, but now her head has popped up to look in the direction of the Jaguar table. “Lee, I need some help too,” she calls out and she makes her way over to the new resident expert in the class.

Art class is never as long as the students would like and there are a few groans as Ms. Pratt announces that it is time to clean up. The students are disappointed, but they get to work putting away their watercolor materials. I stand up and watch as the students slide off their wallpapered musketeer vests and lay them carefully over some sort of apparatus in the back of the room. Now the wallpapered smocks look more like horse saddles than anything else. Although this could be a messy process, the students handle it well. Ms. Pratt calls Lee over to her desk area, praises him for being such a good helper and rewards him with Magician Money which is part of some sort of school-wide incentive program. As he heads back to his seat, the bounce in his step and his smile have raised yet another level.

Somehow during the action that comes along with clean up time, the tiny blonde girl who needed help has come all the way over to my little outpost of the room from her Alligator table. She’s holding her kite face down around her waist level. She doesn’t say much, but she wants...
my attention just the same. She stands flat-footed, smiles, and holds up her kite with both hands right under her chin. The stapled streamers of her kite wave gently underneath.

“That’s beautiful,” I say. “Did Lee help you?”

“Yes,” she says quietly as she nods her head. Her smile grows even wider for a moment; she pivots and heads to the door where many of the Castle Guard are starting to line up.

And now there’s a bounce in her step too.

**Cooperation in the Art Room**

The above narrative from my fieldnotes was just one of many examples that I witnessed of peer assistance, peer tutoring, cooperation, or overall scaffolding techniques during my time in Ms. Pratt’s art room at Rexrode Elementary School. Related studies to multi-age art education have cited the benefits of cross-age cooperation as being bi-directional, or beneficial to both the younger and older students involved in such interaction (Kelehear & Heid, 2002). In this case, I saw the benefits of peer assistance in Ms. Pratt’s room as being tri-directional. Both Lee and at least one of the girls he helped seemed to experience a boost in their self-esteem in this process; hopefully the girls learned a thing or two about the handling of materials as well. However, Ms. Pratt also benefited in this transaction in terms of her ability to address both classroom management and time management issues. Although Ms. Pratt had wisely provided two activities for the students to work on, Lee still finished both assignments early and was on the verge of, at the very least, becoming slightly off-task. By encouraging Lee to help his friends, Ms. Pratt successfully redirected his attention to playing a productive role in the assignment. Furthermore, as Lee took over the role of the expert stapler in the class, Ms. Pratt was able to free herself from the small group of children who needed her assistance in that area and was able to circulate to other children in the room and cover more ground.

In a similar instance, Ms. Pratt was instructing a different pod within the Castle Guard multi-age house. This particular pod had already completed both their warm and cool color paintings and was now ready to combine the two projects into one as a weaving assignment. During Ms. Pratt’s demonstration of the weaving process, one girl on the carpeted area spoke up with wide eyes. “Oh! I know how to do this. I’ve made one before,” she said. Time would tell that this was not a mere case of braggadocio and the student did indeed finish her weaving assignment early and accurately. Ms. Pratt encouraged the student to help some of her friends who were struggling to see the weaving pattern or were having difficulty manipulating the small
strips of paper over and under the slits of their warm or cool colored warp. The particularly interesting aspect of this case was not so much that the student assisted the other members of the Castle Guard, rather it was how she did it. She circulated from the Dolphin Table, to the Alligator Table, to the Jaguar Table in much the same way that a teacher might circulate and assist throughout a classroom. As she went from classmate to classmate, she often simply pointed out places where students had skipped a step in their pattern and allowed them to correct the mistake on their own. In other cases, she simply offered suggestions to her classmates: “It’s easier if you push the strip down when you’re done.” In this respect, she served more as a peer tutor than perhaps Lee had in the previous example. She only seemed to manipulate the students’ projects as a demonstration or as a last resort.

Although these two incidents of peer assistance and peer tutoring were initiated by students who had finished their work early, this was not always the case nor was it always the catalyst for the scaffolding that took place in Ms. Pratt’s room. Sometimes the cooperation that took place within the art room was a result of the way that Ms. Pratt had designed her lessons or had set up the physical space of her art room. During the plaster mask-making activity mentioned previously, Ms. Pratt had set up a hot-glue gun station on one of her countertops (see Figure 19). This area was used by the students when they were ready to add decorations to their projects. Having a separate hot-glue gun station served several purposes: (a) it was a way to disperse a limited number of resources that required electrical outlets, (b) it helped to ensure that only students who had brought back returned permission slips had access to such hot, gooey substances, and (c) it allowed the students to work together on a sticky, tricky task that often required more than one set of hands. My fieldnotes taken during the times I was near the hot-glue station contained some of the most heavily coded sections dealing with peer assistance and peer suggestions. Students would often hold each other’s masks to steady it, help attach decorations, retrieve needed materials from a nearby supply table when things got sticky (“Will somebody get me the bucket of beads?”), share the glue guns and other materials, warn each other of safety issues, and seek out peer advice (“What do you think? Does it look like a flower?” “Do I need more cotton balls?” “Where do you think I should put my pompoms?”).

Many of these examples are, of course, instances of peer support which can be construed as a slightly different type of interaction than many might picture when describing scaffolding activities involving two or more students working directly together on one project or task.
However, these instances do point to the overall cooperative rather than competitive atmosphere (Elkind, 1993) that I felt in Ms. Pratt’s art room at Rexrode Elementary School. On more than one occasion I saw entire groups of intermediate students cheer out loud for a classmate when Ms. Pratt used his or her artwork as an example.

Figure 19. Hot-glue gun station and hot bed of peer interaction in Ms. Pratt’s multi-age art room at Rexrode Elementary School

Although I did not personally witness any examples where Ms. Pratt directly assigned her students group activities rather than individual projects, there was evidence that she did so from time to time. The small groups that Ms. Pratt had assigned to work on the “Go Fish” stage design (Figure 18) were just one of several examples of collaborative group work. Ms. Pratt also explained to me that the plaster mask project began as a group process before it branched out into individual masks that were painted and decorated by individual students. Prior to my observations at Rexrode Elementary School, the students had worked in groups of twos and threes as they applied the wet, pre-prepared strips of plaster gauze to one another’s faces. Ms. Pratt also described to me an art criticism activity that was much in the spirit of using cooperative learning groups (Wong & Wong, 1998).
“The ones [small group activities] that are more powerful to me,” said Ms. Pratt, “are when you group kids and they have a mission. They have an assignment and each child in that group has something that they’re doing for the group. The group cannot function without each person having a role to play. And there are times when I’ll group kids together and they’ll each be looking at a piece of artwork. One child might be in charge of assessing what types of lines they see and another person might be in charge of assessing what sorts of colors. And each of them has an equal say in what makes that painting or that piece of artwork itself. After they kind of analyze what they are looking at, then they come up with a group theory. This is where they all come together then with their various information and come up with a group theory as to what the artist was trying to convey.

“When you do situations like that, you have to have it very carefully thought out for it to be successful. I would have to choose who’s going to do what and which groups certain children will be in. So you have to balance it very carefully. And those kids that are behind or lower level, you’ve got to give them a chance to participate as well. And by giving them an assignment or particular role within that group, that assures good quality and opportunities between all of them. You want this to be a group-held process, not just something that one person does on their own. It defeats the whole purpose of small group work. Everybody contributes to the final product. And there are occasions where, depending on the group, I will have them do a presentation once they’ve gone through this process. And of course you didn’t get to see it, but once they go through this process then they do a little presentation, a little talk, and they actually take questions. Because at the end of all of this investigation that they’re doing, they end up with a lot of information that they can share. They become resident experts on that particular painting and that particular sculpture. So that ties into all their self-esteem and all of that. And they all feel proud of what they’ve done. And then that’s my end result. They learn and become more comfortable with evaluating art work.”

All in all, the use of cooperative learning, peer assistance, peer tutoring, and overall scaffolding techniques seemed to resonate very well in Ms. Pratt’s multi-age art room. At times she would direct students to be helpers when they finished their work early. At other times peer interaction occurred as a result of how she had arranged her lessons or even the art room itself. Still at other moments the activities were designed specifically to include cooperative groupings.
such as the stage designs for “Go Fish,” the described art criticism activity, and the first half of the mask activity.

The overall atmosphere in Ms. Pratt’s room was cooperative rather than competitive, which is not to say that behavior problems never happened. It is to say that misbehavior was rare, Ms. Pratt dealt with issues quickly, and the overall feel of the atmosphere was cooperative. It is possible that such positive peering activities would have occurred in Ms. Pratt’s art room regardless of the presence of multi-age groups. She is an excellent teacher with lots of experience and good classroom management skills. Many of the principles of multi-age education have been considered good principles of effective instruction when applied to any classroom, regardless of whether or not the students are placed in mixed age groups (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Serig, 1995). Furthermore, I could not always be certain that the interaction I was watching was always between children of two different grade levels. Much of this interaction could have been, for example, between two second graders within the same multi-age class. The assumption is that the cooperative atmosphere established within a multi-age group permeates throughout the entire pod and does not always have to result in an older child assisting a younger child. The overall concept is one that advocates learners helping other learners. In such atmospheres it is not always the younger child who requires assistance. “It’s the older ones too,” says Ms. Pratt. “Depends on the kids, you know. It goes both ways.”

Professional Autonomy and Teacher Training

The collected survey data on the subjects of professional autonomy and teacher training were particularly revealing. Out of the 36 surveyed art teachers, 34 (94.44%) indicated that they felt their multi-age teaching position had been assigned without a choice in the matter. Less than half of the surveyed art teachers (41.67%) indicated that they had participated in any professional development workshops or trainings that they felt were helpful to their multi-age teaching practices. Of the 15 art teachers who felt as if they had participated in useful training, only 3 (8.33%) had taken part in workshops specifically designed on the topic of multi-age education. Ms. Pratt’s survey response indicated, like most of her colleagues, that she felt multi-age art education had been assigned to her. However, her survey response also indicated that she had helped to design, write, and implement professional development workshops and training for music, art, and P.E. teachers working in multi-age environments. Considering the apparent
relevance of these two subjects as revealed by the surveys, I was curious to know more about
Ms. Pratt’s multi-age experiences with professional autonomy and teacher training.

The Irreconcilable Difference

“When it started,” said Ms. Pratt, “what they [the school district] did was request for
principals on their own pace, or at their own speed, to initiate it [multi-age instruction]. And
they were looking for schools that were willing to take it on. And at that point, you needed to
have principals who were willing to take it on and you had to have a willing faculty. And we
were one of those willing faculties at that point in time. We kind of took it and ran with it, those
of us who were willing to do it. And as a group, as our school, I believe we voted on it even.
Enough of us were willing…”

“You voted?” I interrupted.

“I think we kind of had a voting.”

“On whether you wanted to have multi-age or not?”

“Yeah, we were kind of questioned about it as I recall. And it has been quite a while ago.
But they didn’t want to cram something down our throats basically. They wanted a willing
group to work on this. And different administrators stepped up to bat and said, ‘We’ll take this
on because we feel like our staff is ready and willing also. But we need your support.’ And
that’s a critical part of anything. Whenever you do something like this, you have got to have the
support for it too,” said Ms. Pratt.

“But everyone was included in the vote? It wasn’t just homeroom teachers?” I asked.

“No, we were in it too. Although we felt like… Oh God. We don’t have a choice. We
are so outnumbered,” laughed Ms. Pratt. “And there were some who voted against it. Even if
you voted against it, you were still outnumbered. So, what the heck, you just kind of go with the
flow and be flexible. And at first we struggled. Oh my gosh, we are so used to teaching one
particular lesson for third graders and a different lesson for fourth graders and so on. When it
came to this, I said, ‘Oh man, it totally messes up my Chi’. And at that thought, Ms. Pratt let
out another hardy laugh.

“It kind of shook our world a little bit,” she continued. “But as I thought about it and
reflected a little bit about it… It was still going to work, even though we went to multi-age.
Because we are dealing with so many different levels in a group of children anyway. It wasn’t
so much age-specific, it’s how you deal with a group of children, period.”
“How would it have been different if they started the multi-age model, but then the Magicians (art, music, and P.E) said, ‘No. We’re not going to be a part of it.’ How do you think it would’ve been different if that had been the case?” I asked.

“There are some schools that do that. They let the specialists have a little more control in what they do. But again, that’s going against the philosophy. So it depends on the flexibility of the administration. I think that it would’ve been more difficult if we weren’t all on the same page. That causes conflict between the classroom teachers and us as well. Because we’re kind of going in the opposite direction of the direction they’re moving. And we’re classroom teachers too and we need to be together on it. And I think if you don’t have that cohesiveness and that cooperation between all the people in the school, that’s when you get problems. And I think that’s one of the wonderful elements of our school. We really work together. All of us, everyone working together. And that’s the sign of a successful school.”

In this interview excerpt, Ms. Pratt hit upon the irreconcilable difference that presents itself within the tenets of multi-age education when art, music and P.E. teachers are offered a choice as to whether they would like to participate in nongraded models of instruction. According to such tenets, art, music, and P.E. teachers should be asked if they would like to participate in multi-age structures. The mandating of such organizational structures is to be prohibited (Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Otto, 1969). However, if art, music, and P.E. teachers are given a choice, they really have no choice. For Ms. Pratt, voting against it was worthless: “We don’t have a choice. We are so outnumbered.” For other art teachers who are given complete autonomy in the decision (rather than a school-wide democracy), their choice may run head first into the irreconcilable difference itself. If art, music, and P.E. teachers decline to participate in multi-age education, they would in effect be creating unavoidable grade level distinctions. Without the special area teachers’ support, multi-age homeroom teachers would be forced to revert back to grade level groupings in order to send, say, their third graders to P.E., their fourth graders to art, and their fifth graders to music. To make such grade level distinctions is to be avoided at all costs according to the doctrines of multi-age education (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). As Ms. Pratt has discovered, “that’s going against the philosophy.”

In terms of these conflicting tenets, those who organize and implement nongraded structures find themselves between a rock and a hard place. If they offer art, music, and P.E. teachers a choice, they run the risk of setting themselves up for grade level distinctions, a policy
which is to be banished. To not offer the special area teachers a choice is to mandate multi-age education on such teachers, a policy that is to be prohibited (see Figure 20).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 20.** Diagram of the irreconcilable difference or contradiction posed within the tenets of multi-age education when art teachers are given a choice as to their willingness to participate in nongraded instruction.

In the case presented at Rexrode Elementary School, Ms. Pratt certainly was given a vote. But just as certainly, she didn’t feel like she was given a choice. Multi-age models of instruction were mandated on her art program by the voice of majority rule. Internally, however, Ms. Pratt was able to reconcile with the irreconcilable difference presented by this situation through her view of Rexrode Elementary as a successful, cohesive school where homeroom teachers and special area teachers could all be on the same page and moving in the same direction toward a common goal for children.
“Not Everybody is at the Same Place”

“When I was trying to locate all these multi-age schools for this project,” I started to tell to Ms. Pratt, “I heard about these multi-age trainings, like at Muzinek Elementary [another school in Ms. Pratt’s school district]. Did they ever invite art, music, and P.E. teachers to those, to your knowledge? Or was it mainly for the homeroom teachers?”

“I think it was mainly for the homeroom teachers.”

“Ok.”

“Yeah, I really do,” said Ms. Pratt. “I don’t remember getting anything like that. We could take a course on anything we wanted to.”

“In terms of workshops?”

“In terms of workshops,” she replied, “but timing was a part of it. And whether they would give special area teachers a substitute [so that they could attend a workshop during a school day]. They would give the classroom teachers substitutes. They were like, maybe you [the special area teachers] won’t get much out of it [the training] so we are not going to sponsor substitutes for that. It wasn’t really geared for us. They dealt so much with academic things. They were struggling just to deal with the classroom teachers. And you know from experience that it is the largest group that gets dealt with first. But again, it was pretty much academic. And those were the concerns back then. And we were just going to have to deal with it.”

“Oftentimes,” she continued, “the classroom teachers learn all the new vocabulary and everything and we’re just kind of left out in the wind until somebody says, ‘Hey, what about us?’ So I was one of those windy people and said, ‘Well, how are we going to internalize this? How does this become something real for us?’ So Diana Courtney, who has been our district administrator [for art, music, and P.E. teachers] for about 20 years, and I and couple of other teachers… music and P.E. teachers… were brought in and we helped develop some training to lead the special area teachers in the right way. Leaving them some flexibility to do their thing but understanding the vocabulary and terminology. Most people had no idea what multi-age was. So for many people, they learned it by coming to our training.”

“And we had never really developed training before, so that was really new for us. So Diana Courtney was looking for people who were willing to push themselves and stretch and who have also had some experience they can bring forward and share. But when we were first starting the training stuff, we were really heavily dependent on her. And she taught us how to set
up trainings, how to have a variety of different grouping strategies. You know, all that kind of stuff that makes for successful training programs. And we would have a three-day thing in the summer. We do it every year. It’s called *Connections Training* and it is with art, music, and P.E. teachers. And we go through a whole process of getting everybody on the same page and that is going from state-level stuff, to county-level stuff, to things that are happening at the school, to terminology and definitions, to practical stuff, and theme planning. So we took a lot of information from Diana.”

“I feel strongly that we don’t do enough for our new teachers to help them get in. One of the reasons we developed the Connections Training is to get them familiar with working with multi-age groups. How to figure out how to make it work for them in their school. Not all schools are at the same place and that’s an additional challenge.”

“So for you,” I asked, “do you feel like the Connections Training then is a step in the right direction for preparing new teachers for multi-age?”

“Absolutely… Oh, absolutely!” Ms. Pratt said with some excitement. “And even for the old teachers who don’t want to change. And you know as well as I do there are a lot people that just don’t want to change. It’s a challenge. But usually when workshops go pretty well, they say, ‘Hey, you know I actually got something out of this.’ Well, that’s the idea. You have to put something in to get something out. So it’s the strategies we had in play during the Connections Training that gives everybody the common foundation and common understanding and makes them realize that not everybody is at the same place. Some people are farther ahead [in multi-age implementation] and you can use these people. You can contact them, should you have any questions. There are people under you that you can help too. You know everybody has a place in the whole system, in the flow. So we are really trying to make people more comfortable with the whole multi-age thing.”

From Ms. Pratt’s perspective, the Connections Training was a positive step in the right direction for introducing participants to the terminology and underlying concepts of multi-age education as well as providing participants with a common foundation on the subject. Although participation in multi-age workshops designed specifically for special area teachers seems beneficial, few survey respondents (8.33%) reported attending such trainings. There are a number of possible reasons why this may be the case. The Connections Training that Ms. Pratt spoke of was only offered to special area teachers in her county. It was organized by her district
supervisor and sponsored by a school district that happened to be encouraging teachers to
develop nongraded structures. It’s quite possible, and perhaps very likely, that other districts
have not organized and offered trainings to their special area teachers on the topic of multi-age
education. Perhaps other districts also assume that their special area teachers, as Ms. Pratt
explained, “won’t get much out of it” or are unwilling “to sponsor substitutes for that.” The lack
of availability of multi-age art education training outside of Ms. Pratt’s district may well be the
case. All three survey respondents who mentioned their participation in training directly related
to multi-age education came from Ms. Pratt’s district, and one of these was Ms. Pratt herself.

Of course there are other possible explanations for the overall lack of training presented
by the survey data. The training in Ms. Pratt’s district, for instance, offers the Connections
Training on a volunteer basis and in the summer. So it’s possible that the multi-age art teachers
that returned surveys have simply not taken advantage of the opportunities that were presented to
them. It’s also possible that the art teachers who have had training simply didn’t return their
surveys. For that matter, it’s possible that the snowball sampling technique somehow missed just
those art teachers who have had multi-age art training. (Although it’s unlikely that multi-age
schools in Ms. Pratt’s county were overlooked since Diana Courtney served as a contact person
for identifying the multi-age school sites in that particular district.

During a follow-up phone call, Ms. Pratt did mention that the Connections Training has
historically had more music and P.E. teachers in attendance than art teachers. While this
observation raises many more questions, it is ultimately an issue beyond the scope of this study.
She also mentioned that those art teachers who have attended often return to the workshop for
second and third visits in consecutive summers. She also reported that the Connections Training
held during the summer of 2006, which occurred after the data collection phases of this research
project, had more art teachers in attendance than ever before.

Another interesting aspect of Ms. Pratt’s discussion about the Connections Training is her
observation that “not everybody is at the same place” in terms of multi-age implementation.
Similar to suggestions made by other trainers of multi-age education (District School Board of
Pasco County, 1993), this comment from Ms. Pratt suggests that there may be gradual steps that
art educators can take as they slowly work their way toward the ideal goals of nongradedness. In
this process there will be some people “farther ahead” and some “people under you” that can aid
each other in the gradual assumption of the possibilities presented by multi-age structures. In a
sense, there are differing developmental levels to multi-age teaching just as there are differing developmental levels in a multi-age classroom. With this thought in mind, I began to wonder if there could also be a suggested continuum of development for art teachers who find themselves working with mixed age groups of children as well.

**Sameness with Graded Structures**

Another subtle pattern that emerged within the survey data was that a cluster of respondents indicated their opinion that multi-age groupings really aren’t all that different than traditional grade level groupings. This pattern did not emerge in response to one particular survey question, but become apparent when I looked across all open-ended survey responses for repeated codes. The overall expressed sentiment in these responses was that art teachers would still be teaching groups of children that consisted of differing developmental levels in both graded and nongraded classrooms. Even within graded structures, mental age data suggests that a typical first grade classroom can have up to a four-year gap in students’ readiness levels (W. Miller, 1996) and some have maintained that this gap actually widens with each additional school year (Eisner, 1998b). Considering this, it seems little wonder that one survey respondent wrote: “There is just as much variety in skills, knowledge, and ability among students in single grade classrooms. Multi-age is no big deal.” Another survey respondent stated: “In art, I believe each person is going to develop at their own rate. You will have those with advanced skills in with the novice even in self-contained classes.”

During my conversations with Ms. Pratt, she also expressed, at times, her opinion that multi-age groupings in the art room may not be all that different than age-specific groupings in terms of the presence of differing developmental levels. At one point, Ms. Pratt and I were discussing the topic of peer assistance in her multi-age art classroom when she suddenly said, “What’s interesting with the whole thing is that… this was something that came through my mind before… if you have a class of just first graders, you’re going to have a tremendous range anyway… So what’s the difference, you know?”

In a completely different interview session, Ms. Pratt explained how after the initial shock of the democratically mandated implementation of multi-age structures on her art program, she came to the realization that not many things would change in the make-up of her art classes after all. “Well, I think initially when we first moved into it,” started Ms. Pratt, “It kind
of threw me for a loop, as it did with some other people. Worrying about, ok, I want third graders doing a different project than fourth graders and fifth graders. It kind of shook our world a little bit.” After some reflection, she indicated that she realized she was already teaching to a wide range of developmental levels, so she didn’t see why multi-age groupings couldn’t work in her art room. “Within a regular classroom… Within a kindergarten, you’ve got some kids who are at a first grade level. You’ve got kids that are at a pre-K level, developmentally and socially and all these different things. So we already had a mixture of classes and of children anyway. So, when I look back on it, that’s kind of the way it felt.”

On two other separate occasions, Ms. Pratt explained how multi-age groupings might broaden the developmental ranges within a class slightly, but that this broadening had, at best, only a minor impact on the dynamics of her art instruction. “You know, even in just a grade-specific class you’re going to have a whole range,” said Ms. Pratt. “So it just gets even bigger when you mix them together in multi-age. But for the most part, it doesn’t have that much of an impact.”

On the second occasion, Ms. Pratt was explaining to me a situation where a child became frustrated on a day when I had not been to her class for observations. “I had one boy shut down yesterday in class,” Ms. Pratt told me. “There was nothing threatening about the painting. I just had them doing abstract lines and shapes at their table. That was frustrating for me to see him getting frustrated over something that simple. But I had to keep him moving along for those kids who are a little further along socially as well as developmentally, and that’s frustrating to me.” In the process of telling me about the boy, Ms. Pratt concluded: “But you would have had that in a regular first grade class. You’re going to have kids who are less socially developed, you know. So it’s really just a little bit broader, but not that much so.” The fact that the lesson was “nothing threatening” and was “something that simple” indicates that perhaps this particular lesson was not even pushing the boundaries of expected developmental ranges or of the gray area between the perceived advantages of scaffolding and the disadvantages of developmental ranges that are perceived to be too wide (see Figure 13). The fact that Ms. Pratt “just had them doing abstract lines and shapes at their table” seems to confirm her suspicion that this frustration would have happened even in a traditional grade level setting, and perhaps the differences between graded and nongraded structures are not all that different.
Finally, from my own perspective as the primary instrument for collecting, analyzing, and making sense of my qualitative data (Eisner, 1998a), I also felt as if there were a certain sameness to the art instruction I was observing in Ms. Pratt’s multi-age classroom with good instruction delivered in any classroom. Ms. Pratt was an excellent art teacher. And her multi-age instruction was excellent as well. I’m not sure though, that she would have taught these lessons much differently if her classes had consisted of students from entirely the same grade level. Certainly, the behind-the-scenes organizational structure and planning of her lessons was different. But was her art instruction actually that much different? As I reflect upon the lessons that I watched her teach (the Arcimboldo Fruity Faces, the decoration of the masks, the warm and cool color weaving project, the art criticism activity, the expressive kites, and so on), I could certainly see these lessons being equally effective in graded structures. Even the collaborative activities that I did not have the opportunity to watch could have worked well with graded students. Collaborative art activities are still possible in single grade situations (Hurwitz, 1993).

If I had been sent to Rexrode Elementary School on a different set of circumstances, with no knowledge of the multi-age structures in place, would I have noticed a difference? If I had been sent to Rexrode Elementary to do teacher evaluations, for instance, I feel that I would have walked away with a glowing review and would have likely commented that the students worked extraordinarily well together. I would have commented that the art lessons and projects were well thought out, well planned, and well implemented. Perhaps, just perhaps, I might have observed in certain cases that there were some noticeable differences in the size and height of students within particular classes. But I’m not convinced that I would have picked up on the fact that there was something organizationally different about these classes. My point is this: I witnessed excellent art instruction at Rexrode Elementary School. And good teaching is good teaching, regardless of whether or not students are placed in mixed age groups (Anderson & Pavan, 1993).

In consideration of the sameness that I had experienced in observing multi-age art classes, I once again reflected upon the approach toward multi-age art instruction outlined by Serig (1995). The approach advocated the use of scaffolding techniques and open-ended conceptual or thematic units that frequently tied into the themes used by multi-age homeroom teachers. However the approach also advocated giving students a choice in art materials to explore such themes and giving the students choices as to whether they would like to approach
the topic or problem at hand in groups or as individuals. In this second aspect, Serig’s approach does seem rather different than instruction I have typically witnessed in most graded classrooms. In light of this realization and how well Ms. Pratt’s multi-age classes functioned, I wondered again if there could also be a suggested continuum of development for art teachers who find themselves working with mixed-age groups of children as well.

Summary

The qualitative research techniques of observation and interviews were used to provide an in-depth examination of the qualities that characterize multi-age art instruction at a uniquely selected school site purposefully chosen from the responses of 36 potential participants. The supporting research questions, coded data, and emerging themes were used to identify six categories for discussion including (a) the organizational structure of the multi-age classes at the qualitative observation site, (b) the selected art teacher’s strategies for organizing her multi-age art classes and lessons, (c) the use of thematic instruction, (d) the use of cooperation and other scaffolding techniques, (e) the topics of professional autonomy and teacher training, and (f) the emerging sameness that multi-age models of art education may have with traditional graded models.

The multi-age classes at the selected school site, referred to as Rexrode Elementary, were arranged in primary and intermediate houses, rather than classes, that consisted of combinations of three consecutive traditional grade levels. Each multi-age house had been given a class name that had thematic connections to the school’s mascot, referred to as the Knights, and the overall medieval theme adopted by the school. The names of these teams seemed entrenched within the school culture and grade level distinctions were not normally used when referring to these classes. Each multi-age house was team-taught and consisted of as many as five or six homeroom teachers and individual class spaces. Entire multi-age houses were assigned a common time to go to music, art, and P.E. classes so that teams of multi-age homeroom teachers could have a common planning time to meet and plan their pod activities (McCarthey et al., 1996). Rexrode Elementary School had multiple art, music, and P.E. teachers that allowed even the largest of multi-age houses to have such common planning periods. Although the multi-age houses each consisted of three grade levels, the use of developmental groupings most often, but not always, resulted in two grade level combinations for art class. The best description,
however, for the way in which multi-age groups were organized for special area classes was put forth by the primary informant of the study, referred to as Alice Pratt: “It depends on how the team is [configured] when its time for specials.”

Because Ms. Pratt recognized the tendency of multi-age homeroom teachers to send two grade level combinations to art class, she decided to organize her lessons in a developmentally similar fashion. In general, she planned her lessons for developmental groups consisting of kindergarten and first graders, first and second graders, third and fourth graders, fourth and fifth graders, and a traditional grade level grouping in the case of some kindergarten-oriented classes. As a result, Ms. Pratt actually had to prepare for fewer lesson plans per week than she did when planning for traditional grade levels. The plan worked well because of the established developmental grouping patterns used by the large multi-age houses at the selected school site. Furthermore, Ms. Pratt also showed her ability to take a similar lesson plan concept and make adaptations in its delivery as a way to scale the lesson up or down to meet the appropriate developmental level and character of each separate multi-age pod. In effect, this practice showed one of Ms. Pratt’s strategies for reaching “more than just one grade with a lesson.”

The multi-age homeroom teachers at Rexrode Elementary did flexibly regroup their students, particularly at the end of quarterly grading periods, in order to meet the changing developmental and interest needs of their students. This flexible regrouping of students did result in inconsistent and changing art rosters for Ms. Pratt and her teaching partner, Ms. Kahan. Because the two art teachers planned similar topics together, and because Ms. Pratt kept her developmental groups working on similar topics and art projects, this flexible regrouping did not cause the art teachers to experience significant interruptions in their art lessons. In such cases, Ms. Pratt merely had to assign the regrouped student a new seat and, perhaps, a new place to store his or her artwork. The student was able to pick up and continue his or her ongoing art project without loosing much continuity to the lesson.

In rare cases, a student or two was flexibly regrouped across the developmental divisions established by Ms. Pratt’s structure for organizing art lessons. In these instances, such switches did interrupt the continuity of lessons, but Ms. Pratt was able to use her professional experience, rapport with students, and existing teaching repertoire to finesse the situation to a positive outcome. At other school sites where the flexible regrouping of students occurs across three
grade levels on a more regular basis, art teachers may consider widening their organization of developmental lesson plans to a three-year span rather than two-year groupings.

The multi-age practice of looping, or students staying with the same teachers for a period of years (Kasten & Lolli, 1998), also had a minor impact on the long term organizational structure of Ms. Pratt’s lesson planning. Because a particular multi-age student would typically stay with the same group of teachers for a three-year period, Ms. Pratt could not repeat a particular lesson until a three-year cycle had passed. Although multi-age art teachers would likely be generating fewer lesson plans per year, they would not be able to repeat these lessons until a three-cycle had concluded.

The use of thematic instruction and thematic integration resonated very well in Ms. Pratt’s multi-age art classroom. Because Ms. Pratt had an organized list of county and classroom themes to review during preplanning, she was able to pick and choose those themes and topics that seemed to have the strongest connections to the visual arts and design art lessons based around those themes. If the theme did not seem to have strong connections to the arts, Ms. Pratt did not attempt to force the issue when such connections did not seem to occur naturally. At other times, the visual and performing arts teachers were able to address topics of their own creation, such as the many activities that revolved around Rexrode Elementary’s 10th anniversary Renaissance Fair celebration. Overall, Ms. Pratt’s thematic approach to designing multi-age art lessons allowed students to explore such topics and themes at their own developmental and readiness levels. Ms. Pratt felt empowered by those instances where she was able to connect with the larger themes being studied throughout her school and felt as if she was making valuable and creative contributions to the students’ study of such themes.

The overall atmosphere in Ms. Pratt’s room was cooperative rather than competitive and the use of peer assistance and scaffolding techniques also seemed to resonate well within her multi-age art classes. At times Ms. Pratt would initiate peer assistance situations by encouraging students to help others when they finished their assignments early. In other instances, students could assist one another or seek suggestions from one another because of the way that Ms. Pratt had structured her lessons or organized her art room. Although I did not personally witness instances where students worked directly on group projects, there was much evidence that collaborative art making did occur from time to time at Rexrode Elementary School.
Although the administration at Rexrode Elementary School did allow faculty members to vote on whether or not they wanted to implement multi-age models of instruction, Ms. Pratt still felt as if she did not have an individual choice in the matter. Multi-age models of instruction were mandated on her art program by majority rule. She realized, however, that if multi-age homeroom teachers were forced to send their students to special area classes by grade level, that such a practice would be “going against the philosophy” or doctrines of multi-age education. Her discussion of this topic reveals the irreconcilable difference that presents itself within the tenets of multi-age education when special area teachers are offered a choice about their participation in nongraded models of instruction. If organizers of multi-age education offer special area teachers an option as to their participation in nongraded structures, they run the risk of setting themselves up for grade level distinctions. To not offer the special area teachers a choice is to mandate multi-age education on art, music, and P.E. teachers. Both options present the possibility of situations that directly conflict with tenets of multi-age education (Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Otto, 1969).

Although Ms. Pratt’s school district was encouraging its schools and teachers to adopt multi-age structures, the district did not initially plan to include special area teachers in any district in-service training on the topic. The district supervisor of music, art, and P.E. teachers eventually recruited Ms. Pratt and several other proactive special area teachers to write, develop, and implement training on the topic of multi-age education for music, art, and P.E. teachers. For several years now, Ms. Pratt has been involved in this training session, which is referred to in this chapter as *Connections Training*. The workshop is offered every summer in a three-day session to special area teachers in Ms. Pratt’s district who choose to attend on a voluntary basis. Ms. Pratt feels that such trainings are beneficial and believed that the Connections Training is a positive step in the right direction for introducing and preparing art teachers for the underlying concepts of multi-age education. Her discussion on this topic included the observation that “not everybody is at the same place” in terms of multi-age implementation and suggests that there may be differing, acceptable levels for adopting and developing multi-age practices in the art room.

Further conversations with Ms. Pratt indicated that, in some ways, art instruction in multi-age situations may not be all that different from instruction in traditional graded formats. In both situations, art teachers find themselves delivering instruction to students with a wide
range of developmental levels. From Ms. Pratt’s perspective the developmental range in multi-age classrooms is “just a little bit wider, but not that much so.” From my own perspective as the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Eisner, 1998a) in this research project, I also recognized many similarities between the multi-age art instruction I had witnessed at Rexrode Elementary with art instruction I have observed at traditional graded school sites. In many ways, good teaching is good teaching regardless of the organizational structure in which it is delivered.
CHAPTER SIX:
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The research problem addressed in this study centered on the overall lack of information and resources available about multi-age art education. In order to address this problem, I collected information from a select group of multi-age art teachers that I was able to identify through a snowball sampling technique. First I sent out a written survey to all of the elementary-level, public school multi-age art educators in the State of Florida that I could locate as a way to collect broad contextual information on their practices and perceptions as nongraded art instructors. From the survey results, I also selected a multi-age art teacher and observed her nongraded practices as a way to study the situation in depth. I also conducted several interview sessions with the selected multi-age art teacher. In order to provide organized and cohesive meaning from the results of these research methods, my findings are presented in relationship to the study’s research questions.

The primary question providing focus for this research project is: What qualities characterize art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts from the State of Florida, and what are the implications for structuring and implementing multi-age art education in other Florida schools?

To answer and augment the primary question, several supporting questions have been developed:

1. How are multi-age models of art education organized and structured at the elementary level?
2. Who are the selected multi-age art teachers and what is the nature of their experience as art educators who teach elementary school students that are organized in nongraded groups?
3. What advantages and disadvantages are there for selected art educators engaging in multi-age instruction?
4. How do the purposes of the art educators and the classroom teachers engaged in multi-age education support or conflict with each other?
In this chapter I will first present the findings of the study as they apply to the research questions at hand. Additionally I will discuss the implications of the findings for structuring multi-age models of art education in other Florida schools, the limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for further research.

**Structure and Organization of Multi-age Art Education**

1. How are multi-age models of art education organized and structured at the elementary level?

   As I will illustrate, it is first necessary to understand the organizational structure of multi-age schools and homeroom classes in order to understand the organizational structure of multi-age art education itself. The first factor has a direct, if not complete, impact on the other. The literature review revealed that there are some schools with multi-age programs that may not have been originally conceived to be nongraded institutions from their inception. In some instances, interested teachers who have administrative and parental support may create multi-age classrooms within existing schools as an add-on option (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Furthermore, some trainers of multi-age education (District School Board of Pasco County, 1993) have suggested that there is a continuum of development for teachers or teams of teachers who may be considering the implementation of nongraded structures (see Figure 1). In counties where school district officials are encouraging the creation of multi-age classrooms, there may be cases where some teachers are easing into the structure simply by using peer tutors within their own classroom or by teaming with a partner on the same grade level.

   Whether interested teachers are initiating multi-age configurations within graded schools or teachers are easing into the situation, the strong possibility arises of schools that are only partially nongraded in structure. Because of this likelihood, it stands to reason that art programs at such schools will also only be partially nongraded in configuration as well. Of the 36 art teachers who returned surveys for this study, only 8 (22.22%) reported working at schools that were entirely nongraded in structure. For the respondents involved in this study, then, multi-age models of art education are most often organized in formats where the art teacher will be teaching to both mixed-age and age-specific classes in the same workweek. Interestingly enough, not a single respondent reported the switching from one structure to the other as being a disadvantage of multi-age art instruction. It is possible that this is not a major inconvenience to these art teachers because of the emerging sameness that has been discussed within this study.
That is to say that art teachers may not be bothered much by switching from mixed-age to age-specific classes because they are teaching both groups of students in similar ways.

The multi-age classes within these schools are most often arranged in groups of two or three consecutive traditional grade level combinations. Of the 96 recorded responses from the surveyed art teachers that referred to specific grade level combinations, only 2 could clearly be interpreted as grade level combinations that stretched beyond a three-year span. Overall, the grade level combinations did not appear to result in classes that were uniquely large or small in terms of student enrollment. The literature review also revealed that multi-age classes can be taught by a single homeroom teacher or by group of teachers in a team taught situation (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Chase & Doan, 1994; Cushman, 1993; McCarthey et al., 1996; Miletta, 1996). In the case of the 36 art teachers who returned surveys for this study, the majority of the art teachers worked at schools where team-taught models of multi-age instruction were in place. The results of question 10 on the survey showed that 21 of the respondents (58.33%) worked at schools that only offered team-taught models while 10 more (27.78%) worked at schools that featured both team-taught and singularly instructed multi-age classes. Only 5 respondents reported working at schools that only had multi-age classes that were each taught by single homeroom teachers. Although multi-age classes taught by single teachers working alone appear to be rare among the survey respondents, both models deserve some attention because of the differences in their impact on the organizational structure of multi-age art classes.

The Case of One Homeroom Teacher

The five art teachers who work at school sites that feature only multi-age classes that are each taught by one homeroom teacher apiece will, most likely, never experience the effects of flexible regrouping. Quite simply, a teacher who instructs a multi-age class by him or herself does not have a teaching partner with whom to flexibly regroup. As a result, the art teachers at such schools should, in theory, have rather consistent art rosters. Of course, in the case of these singularly grouped multi-age classes there is also no opportunity for a greater span of grade levels to be narrowed down to a lesser span of grade levels through the use of developmental grouping strategies. At Rexrode Elementary, for example, Ms. Pratt noticed a trend where multi-age houses consisting of three grade levels would often arrive to her art classroom as a developmental group consisting of two grade levels. This narrower regrouping strategy is
unlikely to happen in the case of a multi-age class taught by a single homeroom teacher. Essentially, what the single homeroom teacher has in terms of age and grade levels is what the art teacher will get. With no team teachers to flexibly regroup with, a multi-age class taught by a single teacher that is made up of three grade levels will always be made up of three grade levels, nothing more and nothing less.

Although the issue of professional autonomy most closely relates to another research question, I will briefly mention its relevance in the context of schools that only feature multi-age classes that are taught by one homeroom teacher apiece. It seems very unlikely that the art teachers working at such school sites have many options in accepting these singular classes into their art rooms as anything but mixed-age groups. Since the singular homeroom teacher has no partner to regroup with, it seems highly unlikely that such teachers could even have an option of sending their students to special area classes as a grade-specific group. To have the homeroom teacher separate his or her class into three small groups of eight students each, for example, in order to send just grade specific groups to special areas seems to be unreasonable and a logistical scheduling nightmare in the making.

**The Case of Team Teachers**

Multi-age art teachers who are working with mixed-age classes that are team-taught may experience a slightly different organizational structure. In this case, each multi-age “class” that comes to art is really just one pod from a larger multi-age house. In Ms. Pratt’s schedule, for example, she would see one pod from the Royal Family for the first class of her day on every Monday. On Tuesday, she would see a different pod from the Royal Family (escorted by a different homeroom teacher) for her first class of that day, and so on.

In team taught models of multi-age instruction, the presence of additional teachers and additional class space provides for more opportunities for the flexible grouping and regrouping of pupils by changing developmental levels and by subject area (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Cushman, 1993). Considering this, it is unlikely that a particular student will stay within the same pod and with the same homeroom teacher for the entire school day. One particular child may be placed in proficient developmental group with one teacher for language arts, be working in a mixed-ability group on a social studies project with another homeroom teacher, and finally end his or her day with a third homeroom teacher in an emergent developmental math group. In consideration of all of this student movement, it seems reasonable to assume that the multi-age
pods may arrive to art class in any number of organizational groupings as well. Using a hypothetical situation from Ms. Pratt’s schedule may once again be useful. If the entire Excalibur multi-age house happened to be in developmental math groups at the time of art class, Ms. Pratt may well see a mixed-age group of children arrive at her classroom door that is developmentally grouped as proficient learners in the subject area of math. On the other hand, if the entire Excalibur house happened to study social studies in heterogeneously arranged mixed-ability groups at the time of art class, Ms. Pratt may be more likely to see a wider range of ages and levels show up at her door for art class. As Ms. Pratt explained it to me on one occasion: “As far as how they come to specials [such as art, music, or physical education], we just take them the way we get them.”

Team teachers of multi-age houses can have another impact on the structure and organization of nongraded art education if they flexibly regroup their students during the school year in a way that creates inconsistent art room rosters. The groupings that multi-age teachers form at the beginning of the school year do not necessarily represent unchangeable, set-in-stone groups that will last the entire academic year. At Rexrode Elementary School, the multi-age team teachers often reassessed their students’ ability and developmental levels at the end of each quarterly grading period and made adjustments in their groupings when it was appropriate. At other multi-age schools, teachers may also rearrange their students after pre-testing for upcoming skill sets (say, the instruction of fractions, perhaps, in math) or after presenting their students with interest level choices for upcoming focus novels in language arts (Tomlinson, 2001). In any case, if this shift in pod groupings happens at the same time of day that students are supposed to go to their special area classes, the art teacher may experience a shift in their art room roster as well. Almost half of the survey respondents for this study (48.65%) reported experiencing inconsistent art rosters as the result of the flexible regrouping practices of teams of multi-age teachers.

As an aside on the subject of stable art rosters, I will just briefly mention that Rexrode Elementary’s policy of sending entire multi-age houses to art, music, and P.E. classes at the exact same time seems to be a sound decision. Obviously this practice allows the entire team of multi-age teachers to have a common planning time (McCarthey et al., 1996). Perhaps more importantly, however, is the fact that this policy allows every child within each multi-age house to attend art, music, and P.E. classes on a consistent and stable basis. Let’s say that all of the
pods from King Arthur’s Court were not scheduled to have special area classes at a similar time of day. Let’s say that one pod was supposed to go to special area classes in the morning when students were in developmental math groups, and perhaps another pod was to go to special area classes during the afternoon when students were in mixed-ability science groups. With the flexible movement of children from pod to pod, it quite likely that some children would miss their window of opportunity to attend any special area class during a day or some children may receive, say, two music classes (and perhaps duplicate lessons) in the same day. Sending the entire multi-age house to art, music, and P.E. class at similar times of the day allows the children to attend all of their special area classes on as consistent basis as possible.

The Art Teacher’s Role in Structure and Organization

At a recent professional conference, a colleague and I shared a lengthy conversation after a presentation on this research project during its earlier stages of completion (Broome, 2006). He asked me if it would be possible for art teachers at multi-age school sites to developmentally group their students by ability for art class as well. His query seems echoed in the responses of a small handful of survey participants, one of whom mused: “The idea of multi-age groups is a good one, however, I have never been asked to group students based on art ability.” Still another survey respondent implied a similar sentiment when he or she commented: “I would like art classes based on talent.” One other multi-age art teacher responded: “art abilities aren’t considered in the grouping.”

To some, the creation of such ability groups in art may seem like an appealing situation. It’s possible that the resulting ability-grouped art classes could lead to some dynamic teaching situations. Logistically, however, the creation of such ability grouped art classes could prove to be a scheduling nightmare for multi-age schools. If an art teacher were indeed allowed to form his or her own groupings of multi-age students based on art ability, it stands to reason that music and P.E. teachers should be granted the same privilege. The scheduling confusion would begin as teachers from three distinct special subject areas try to arrange ability groups that resonate across three different disciplines. There is a reason why multi-age houses have all of their students engaged in the same subject area at the same time. A student who may belong in a proficient ability group in art may not belong in a proficient ability group in music, and so on. This would leave multi-age schools with the impossible task of creating a special area schedule that was equitable and fair to all of their students. Inevitably, such a confusing and conflicting
schedule could leave some students without a music, art, or P.E. course for the week. Such an omission is unacceptable and would leave glaring gaps in the education of the whole child.

While some art teachers may find there to be an appeal to having ability groups in their art classes, I would add that the notion seems to overlook some of the true intentions of multi-age education. Seeing multi-age instruction as only using developmentally appropriate lessons is a fallacy. Kasten and Lolli (1998) state that ability grouping is not an appropriate strategy to use when forming a class of multi-age students. Multi-age teachers should attempt to create classes that represent heterogeneity in age and in ability. It is the diverse nature of a multi-age environment that allows teachers to group their students in cooperative learning situations of mixed-ability as well as in developmental groups to work on specific skills (Gaustad, 1993; Hallion, 1994). To put it metaphorically, scaffolding options are limited when all students are standing on the exact same plank with no other levels to reach up to and stand upon. Whether this misinterpretation of multi-age theories is the result of the lack of training and information passed along to art teachers or is more indicative of how classroom teachers have transformed and assimilated (Tyack and Cuban, 1995) the theories of multi-age instruction into ability-grouped practices is undeterminable at this point and beyond the scope of this study.

In any case, multi-age art teachers don’t seem to have much influence on the organizational structural of their own nongraded art classes. Most of the organizational structure is dictated to the art program by the structure of the school itself (completely or partially multi-age), the configuration of mixed-age classes (one homeroom teacher or team teachers), and the choices of team teachers (flexible regrouping). Of course this scenario is essentially the same as presented by the organizational structure of any school, nongraded or otherwise. It is unlikely that art teachers are asked how they want their students to come to class in graded structures as well. Art teachers at the elementary level have always taken students “the way we get them.”

However, just because art teachers have historically had little say in the organizational structure of schools is not to say that this should continue to be the case. Kasten and Lolli (1998) recommended that art, music, P.E., and other special area teachers should be included in the organizational planning of multi-age schools and multi-age curricula. Their view of multi-age education included the belief that nongraded models of instruction would be incomplete without considering the important role that special area teachers play in the development of the whole child. While art teachers at elementary schools may always have to take students “the way we
get them.” that is not to say that they can’t have a say in improving the way that they get them. A case could be made that art teachers’ voices need to be heard in terms of some of the flexible regrouping practices of some multi-age team teachers. In situations where school schedules allow it, multi-age team teachers could take five or so minutes of their time to revert back to their consistently arranged homeroom groups before going to special area classes. Such a practice would eliminate the possibility of flexible regrouping leading to inconsistent art rosters. In cases where the school schedule does not allow for such reversion back to homeroom groups, the needs of special area teachers should still be considered through the prompt, timely, and accurate notification of the planned regrouping of specific students that will affect special area rosters.

In review of the organizational structure of multi-age art education for the 36 respondents who returned surveys, most but not all of the respondents worked at school sites that were only partially multi-age in structure. The multi-age classes at these schools usually consisted of two or three consecutive grade level combinations that were primarily, but not always, taught by teams of teachers. The size of the multi-age classes did not, in general, appear to be unusually large or small in terms of student enrollment. Almost half of the surveyed respondents (48.65%) reported that multi-age team teachers did flexibly regroup their students in such a way that resulted in inconsistent art rosters. Data obtained from the qualitative observation site helped to confirm the researcher’s understanding that these multi-age groups could arrive in art class in any number of organizational groupings. Some multi-age homeroom teachers could send their students to art by heterogeneously arranged mixed-ability groups or by developmental-level groups related to a particular subject area such as math or language arts. Overall, the art teachers themselves did not seem to play a large role in the organizational structure of their multi-age classes in comparison to the decisions of the homeroom teachers and the greater structure of the multi-age schools in general.

Multi-age Art Educators and the Nature of Their Experiences

2. Who are the selected multi-age art teachers and what is the nature of their experience as art educators who teach elementary school students that are organized in nongraded groups?

The review of literature offered descriptions of multi-age teachers in terms of general characteristics and their overall philosophical beliefs toward education (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Chase & Doan, 1994; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). It was revealed that nongraded instruction,
then, is not for all teachers (Grant & Johnson, 1996). As such, recommendations were made that multi-age education should not be mandated or forced upon those who are not suited or inclined to try this method of elementary school organization (Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Otto, 1969). Considering this, I couldn’t help but wonder just who the practicing multi-age art teachers in the State of Florida really are and what their experiences are like.

The Respondents

To my surprise, the survey research revealed that, for the most part, the 36 respondents had only two characteristics in common: (a) most of the respondents had not received training that was specifically designed on the topic of multi-age education, and (b) most of the respondents had not been asked if they would like to participate in multi-age models of instruction. Of these two common characteristics, I will address the latter first as it seems to have the greatest impact on an overall general description of the multi-age art teachers. Overwhelmingly, the survey participants (94.44%) reported that they had not been given a choice as to whether or not they were willing to accept multi-age groups in their classrooms and felt as if they had been assigned the model of organization. Interestingly enough, the mandating of multi-age structures is a policy that is prohibited according to the doctrines of nongraded instruction (Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Otto 1969). This glaring oversight is a topic that deserves further consideration and will be addressed later in this chapter. In the context of this supporting research question, however, the mandating of multi-age structures likely played an important role in the diverse and seemingly random backgrounds of the multi-age art teachers.

In almost every other descriptive category, the multi-age art teachers seemed to have little in common and no obvious patterns emerged from the survey data. In general, the multi-age art educators involved in the survey research were diverse in their years of overall teaching experience and multi-age teaching experience. Most of the art teachers had some previous background in working with mixed-age groups of art students, as only 6 of the 36 respondents (16.67%) were still completing their first year of multi-age instructional service at the time the survey was administered. To display the diversity in the range of the respondents’ multi-age teaching experiences, I will note that 8 of the respondents (22.22%) had been involved in multi-age art education for 1 to 3 years, while 10 of the respondents (27.78%) had been involved for 10 years or more. Most of the surveyed art teachers did teach their multi-age students from their own art rooms, but some did work in portable units, traveled from homeroom to homeroom, or
some combination of all options. All in all, the 36 surveyed respondents appeared to be like any other group of art teachers randomly plucked from 36 public elementary schools in the State of Florida. Some were veterans, some were neophytes, and some had their own art classrooms, while still others probably pushed a cart loaded with art supplies from room to room.

The seemingly random nature of the descriptive characteristics of the multi-age art teachers may best be explained by the fact that they were not given a choice as to their willingness to participate in nongraded teaching structures; the surveyed participants had almost no professional autonomy in the assignment to mixed-age art instruction. Their participation in multi-age education was not guided by choice, but rather by circumstance. As a result, the most common characteristic shared by most of the survey respondents is that they happened to be working at a school site or were offered a job at a school site that had implemented or was planning to implement multi-age models of instruction on some level. For lack of a better term then, the multi-age art educators represent a sort of random sample of art teachers who happened to be at certain place at a certain time.

The other characteristic shared by many of the surveyed multi-age art educators is that, by and large, most of them had not received any specific, useful training designed on the topic of multi-age education. Over half of the 35 respondents, 19 in all (52.78%), reported that they had not participated in any professional development workshops or trainings that helped them in delivering art instruction to multi-age classes. When asked to list the specific trainings that were helpful, only 3 respondents (8.33%) indicated that they had participated in training that was directly geared toward the subject of multi-age education.

These findings are overwhelming, especially when the recommendations of multi-age literature are taken into consideration. One recommendation included the reasonable notion that teachers working in nongraded learning environments require staff development training and access to multi-age research in order to prepare for mixed-age groupings in their own classrooms (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 1991; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Kasten and Clarke (1993) specifically recommended that special area teachers and support staff should be included in multi-age trainings and workshops, while Kasten and Lolli (1998) applauded and supported a successful example where art, music, and P.E. teachers were specifically invited to an annual multi-age retreat with the other members of their multi-age school. While Alice Pratt’s school district did offer multi-age training to music, art, and P.E.
instructors, this training was only offered to those teachers working in her school district and it was offered on a volunteer basis during summer sessions. All three survey respondents who reported attending training specifically designed on the subject of multi-age education were from Ms. Pratt’s school district and one of these respondents was Alice Pratt herself.

Overall, the surveyed multi-age art teachers were very diverse in terms of their descriptive backgrounds, with few obvious patterns resulting from the survey data. The two most overwhelming common characteristics shared among this group of art teachers was that the majority of them had little say in their involvement in multi-age structures and that they had also not received useful training on multi-age instructional practices. With these two pieces of descriptive information firmly established, it was hard not to speculate what the nature of professional experiences might be like for such individuals who had not been trained and had not been offered much, if any, professional autonomy in the decision to have mixed-age groups in their art classrooms.

**Expectation Defying Experience**

In spite of the lack of training and the lack of professional autonomy offered to the art educators, 20 of the 36 surveyed art teachers (55.56%) expressed their overall support of multi-age grouping in elementary art classrooms in contrast to the 8 respondents (22.22%) that expressed their opposition. While 55.56% may not seem like an overwhelming percentage, it is certainly a figure that defies conventional wisdom on the subject of teacher autonomy and teacher preparation. As the primary instrument of making meaning from my data (Eisner, 1998a), I wonder if I could have ever predicted such results if someone would have told me from the outset that 34 of the 36 respondents had felt like multi-age education had been mandated on their art programs and that only 3 of the respondents had received training specifically designed on the subject of multi-age education. This contradiction in widely accepted expectations toward professional autonomy and teacher preparation was an indication that there may be more to the nature of the respondents’ experiences as multi-age art educators than the survey data could have revealed alone.

The data obtained through both field research and survey research methods reveals that the nature of multi-age art education seems to be one in which both scaffolding techniques and thematic instruction resonate just as well as they do in other multi-age classrooms and in multi-age literature. Additionally, both data collection sources revealed some evidence that the nature
of experiences in multi-age models of art instruction may not have to be all that different than the nature of experiences in graded models of art education.

I will begin by first reviewing the use of scaffolding techniques as introduced in the survey data. Scaffolding is the process that takes place when a more advanced partner (or partners) works with others to serve as a foundation for which the less experienced member(s) may stand upon in order to reach new levels of knowledge that they may not have gained when acting alone (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Interestingly enough, both the most frequently mentioned resources and instructional methods cited by the survey respondents fall within the related realm of scaffolding techniques. The most frequently mentioned resource used by the survey respondents was classroom space that allowed for the grouping of students (reported by 83.33% of participants). Similarly, the most frequently mentioned instructional methods used by the survey respondents included the use of cooperative learning groups (reported by 77.77% of respondents), peer tutors and peer assistants (69.44% of respondents).

Similar scaffolding strategies worked with excellent effects in Ms. Pratt’s multi-age art classroom, where the overall atmosphere was cooperative rather than competitive. At times Ms. Pratt would direct students to help others when they finished their work early. The use of this technique seemed to have tri-directional benefits. The students who received assistance were able to complete tasks that they might not have been able to accomplish on their own. The students who provided the assistance seemed to experience a boost in self-esteem and, perhaps, a crystallization of their own knowledge as they expressed and transferred concepts to others in the art room. Ms. Pratt seemed to benefit too as the peer assistance allowed to her to address other classroom management and time management issues in her instructional environment.

On other occasions, Ms. Pratt stimulated peer interaction through the way in which she arranged her lessons or even the art room itself. This was most certainly the case in the many instances of peer assistance, peer interaction, and the seeking of peer suggestions that occurred at the hot glue-gun station that Ms. Pratt had set up during a mask-making project. Still at other moments, Ms. Pratt was able to show me evidence of art activities that she had designed that specifically required students to work in cooperative groupings. These examples included the first stages of the mask making activity, the “Go Fish” stage designs, and an art criticism activity that required students to explore works of art as a team. The peer interaction that I witnessed in Ms. Pratt’s art room seemed to be an asset to all who were involved.
In a similar manner, both the survey results and qualitative data seemed to point to the use of thematic instruction as a method that also resonated equally well in multi-age art classrooms. Overall, 72.22% of the survey respondents reported using thematic integration from time-to-time in their art instruction, usually when the connections between multi-age homeroom themes and the nature of visual arts education appeared to be strong. Although the 26 art educators who reported using thematic integration did so with varying levels of enthusiasm, there were only 5 respondents (13.88%) who outwardly had a negative stance on making connections with the multi-age homeroom themes.

Ms. Pratt also used thematic instruction and thematic integration on a regular basis at Rexrode Elementary School as well. Ms. Pratt was provided with a list of multi-age homeroom themes before the school year had ever started. This allowed her to pick and choose those themes that seemed to have the strongest and most relevant connections to the arts and build thematically integrated art lessons around those concepts. Having a list of themes in advance allowed her to make long term plans and limited awkward situations where homeroom teachers would spring last minute suggestions on an unsuspecting art teacher. Ms. Pratt did not attempt to make connections with every classroom theme on the list, especially if the conceptual connections to the visual arts did not seem to occur naturally. At other times, Ms. Pratt and the other special area teachers at Rexrode Elementary School created their own themes to explore in their classrooms and throughout the school. Ms. Pratt, herself, felt that the use of thematic integration was empowering to her as an art teacher. She felt as if she were making a valuable contribution to both the goals of Rexrode Elementary and also to the students’ immersion in thematic investigations.

One of the greatest benefits that I noticed when considering the use of theme-based lessons in multi-age art classrooms, is that this broad open-ended approach allowed students to explore such themes at their own pace and at their own developmental and readiness levels (Serig, 1995). During my observations at Rexrode Elementary, I did not see Ms. Pratt use a theme-based lesson that did not allow students to approach a task or art activity at their own developmental level. In this aspect, theme based instruction may offer a solution to those multi-age art educators that may be struggling with the presence of differing developmental levels within their art rooms. This suggestion is one that will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter.
Finally there is some indication in both the survey results and the results of qualitative analysis that the nature of experiences of art teachers who work with mixed-age groups of students may not have to be all that different than the nature of experiences of those who work in traditional graded art classrooms. During survey analysis, a pattern emerged when I looked across the open-ended survey responses of all questions, rather than just the codes from each separate question. There were a handful of respondents who suggested that teaching art to multi-age groups of students is not much different than teaching to graded groups of students since both models still contain wide developmental ranges within their frameworks. This sentiment is best summed up by the respondent who wrote: “I really think I teach the same as I would a straight grade level class as I would a multi-age class. Because no matter what, both kinds of classes have high and low students.” Ms. Pratt came to similar conclusions at several points in our conversations and interviews as well. At one point she stated, “If you have a class of just first graders, you’re going to have a tremendous range anyway… So what’s the difference, you know?” Indeed mental age data does show that a typical first grade classroom can have up to a four-year gap in students’ readiness levels (W. Miller, 1996) and some have maintained that this gap actually grows wider over each successive school year (Eisner, 1998b).

I also noticed that the instruction I witnessed in Ms. Pratt’s classroom did not feel all that different from good instruction that I might witness in traditional graded art classrooms. It occurred to me that the type of lessons she used and the ways that she delivered that instruction would have been very effective in a graded context as well. Good teaching is good teaching, no matter whether students are placed in multi-age groups or not. Although the organizational structure of multi-age education may seem very different from that of “real school” to some, Hunter (1992) implied that teaching in a multi-age classroom is not all that different from effective instruction in any classroom. Many of the principles of multi-age education have been considered good principles of effective instruction when applied to any classrooms, regardless of whether or not the students are placed in mixed age groups (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Serig, 1995). Through my interviews with Ms. Pratt, I knew that the behind-the-scenes planning and organization of her multi-age lessons did contain significant differences, but her excellent instruction itself held a certain quality of sameness for me that I expect she would have tapped into even with traditional graded art classes. How this sameness relates to Serig’s (1995)
approach to multi-age art education, which did seem to hold significant differences from graded models of art instruction, will be discussed later in this chapter.

In summary, the nature of experience for the multi-age art educators involved in this study was one that was surprisingly supportive. In spite of the overwhelming lack of training and professional autonomy offered to these multi-age art educators, the majority of survey respondents expressed their support for the use of multi-age grouping in elementary art classrooms. The multi-age teaching methods of using scaffolding techniques and thematic instruction were also supported in the art classroom and seemed to resonate there equally well. An emerging pattern in the survey responses and in qualitative data analysis indicated that multi-age art instruction may not have to be as different from traditional graded models of instruction as some might think it has to be. Both models of instruction have to address the presence of students from a wide variety of developmental levels within its class rosters. Observations within a multi-age art classroom held a certain feeling of sameness to it in terms of the structure of art lessons and the way that lessons were delivered.

**Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages**

3. What advantages and disadvantages are there for selected art educators engaging in multi-age instruction?

In terms of the advantages and disadvantages of multi-age art instruction as expressed by the surveyed art teachers, the results were both very distinct and very polarized. For both advantages and then disadvantages, I will first present the most obvious of these findings before addressing other expressed pros and cons that seem to be of importance but may have been mentioned less frequently.

**Advantages**

By far, the most frequently expressed advantage of multi-age art instruction reported by the surveyed art teachers related to the model’s use of scaffolding techniques. Of the 36 surveyed art teachers, 21 respondents (58.33%) indicated that the use of scaffolding, in some form or another, was an advantageous aspect of multi-age art instruction. Some of these respondents referred to cooperative learning groups, peer tutoring, peer assistance, or distinct benefits to older or younger students. A representative comment from these respondents comes from a survey participant who felt that the use of scaffolding techniques held bi-directional
benefits to students on both ends of the developmental spectrum: “Students who are low in areas
can see older students as role-models, and older students can learn more by helping the low
students.” Another respondent summed up the scaffolding metaphor and its benefits when he or
she reported the advantages of “having children learn from each other! They can rise to the next
level.”

Another advantage of multi-age art instruction, from the art teacher’s perspective, may be
that the use of developmental grouping strategies can result in the preparation of fewer lesson
plans per week and per entire school year. In Ms. Pratt’s case, she noticed an overall pattern in
how most of the multi-age classes at Rexrode Elementary School came to her art class in
developmental groups of two consecutive grade level combinations. As a result, Ms. Pratt
organized her lessons into similar developmental zones that generally consisted of kindergarten
and first grade groupings, first and second grade groupings, third and fourth grade groupings,
fourth and fifth grade groupings, and a traditional grade level grouping in the case of some
kindergarten-orientated classes. As a result, Ms. Pratt’s planning load was reduced from six or
more distinct preparations a week to four or five developmental preparations per week. As Ms.
Pratt said, “It’s really almost easier because it’s less planning . . . I have more kids working on
the same type of thing at a time, instead of these different lessons. So for me, I think it’s an
advantage from a teacher’s point of view.”

For Ms. Pratt and a number of survey respondents, there were also great advantages to
the use of theme-based lessons that were to be applied across subject areas and disciplines as was
advocated by the philosophies of multi-age education (Lolli, 1998). Because her school district
was encouraging teachers to consider thematic instruction within multi-age frameworks and
because Rexrode Elementary School had decided to follow the county’s suggestions, Ms. Pratt’s
art program could be connected to the goals of the school in ways that perhaps it had not been in
the past. Traditional models of schooling often treat each subject area as distinct, isolated
disciplines that have no relationship to one another (Dewey, 1916/1997). Mathematics is
mathematics, language arts is language arts, science is science, the visual arts are the visual arts,
and none of these separated units of curricula necessarily have to connect to one another, let
alone actually mean something to one another.

Broad-based thematic units, on the other hand, typically ask questions relevant to the
lives of students and are open-ended enough to be approached from a number of angles,
perspectives, disciplines, and subject areas (Shanahan, Robinson, & Schneider, 1995). From Ms. Pratt’s perspective, her ability to connect to these themes made her feel as if she were making an even greater contribution to the overall shared goals of Rexrode Elementary and her county at large. She found her ability to integrate with school themes to be empowering and felt that it made her program “more valuable.” Perhaps even more important to Ms. Pratt and the 12 survey respondents who held a favorable stance toward thematic integration was that this practice allowed them to contribute to the students’ exploration of knowledge and concepts in a creative and expressive way that might have otherwise been overlooked. One survey participant wrote: “I believe tying curriculum to other disciplines increases students’ knowledge and awareness of the connectedness of the various subjects that they study.” Ms. Pratt told me that the advantage was really “for the kids. [They’re] benefiting too because they’re getting a deeper, richer, pocket of knowledge out of the whole thing.” And in this aspect, for the sake of her students, Ms. Pratt found thematic integration to be a “beautiful thing.”

Disadvantages

By far, the most frequently expressed disadvantage of multi-age art instruction as reported by the surveyed art teachers related to the perception that the span of differing developmental levels within multi-age art classrooms was too great. Of the 36 surveyed art teachers, 20 respondents (55.55%) indicated that it was difficult to reach such widely varied levels of development within their multi-age art classrooms. Some of the respondents felt that planning for this difference in developmental levels could result in lessons that bored older students, while others felt that lessons could be too hard or frustrating for younger students. A representative comment from these respondents comes from a survey participant who indicated that “skill levels vary greatly. If you teach to the middle, slower students are lost while advanced students are bored.” Another respondent echoed this sentiment when he or she wrote: “Lower skilled students compare themselves to older students with more skills and feel frustrated, [while] younger students hold older students back.” Ms. Pratt could also describe rare instances where the presence of differing developmental levels became problematic. “Sometimes I feel like I’m pushing the younger ones along too fast or expecting too much of them,” she told me on one occasion. “Sometimes it’s frustrating for the kids that I might be moving along just a little too fast in those mixed-age younger classes. I have to be careful of that.” But in the end of that same conversation Ms. Pratt would come to the conclusion: “But you would have that in a
regular first-grade class. You’re going to have kids who are less socially developed, you know. So it’s really just a little bit broader, but not that much so.”

The flexible regrouping practices of some multi-age team teachers can also present some disadvantages or difficulties for multi-age art educators. Although only three survey respondents mentioned the effects of flexible regrouping as being a disadvantage or as playing a role in their opposition to multi-age art education, it’s not hard to imagine that having different students show up to an art classroom with a different classmates on any given week, especially in the middle of ongoing art projects, could at least present some inconveniences for multi-age art teachers. The survey data did reveal, through use of comparisons across variables, that those art teachers who experience the effects of flexible regrouping may be more likely to oppose multi-age art education than those art teachers who always have consistent art room rosters.

The multi-age practice of looping, or students staying with the same teacher(s) for a prescribed period of years (Kasten & Lolli, 1998), could present some difficulties for the established habits of some art teachers. Because a student within a multi-age class will remain under the guidance of the same teacher(s) for a set number or years, multi-age art teachers cannot simply recycle the same project year after year like they might in cases where they always teach the same lesson to, say, Ms. Margolis’ class because Ms. Margolis always teaches first grade. Instead, multi-age art teachers will not be able to repeat a particular art lesson until a prescribed cycle of years has passed. Based on the information provided by the survey data, such cycles are most likely to last for periods of two or three years. Admittedly, the issue of repeatability may only cause difficulties for certain art teachers. It has been my experience as an art educator that many art teachers prefer not to repeat the same lesson from year to year so that they can try out new ideas and keep things fresh for themselves as well as their students. However I have also met and conversed with many art teachers who have developed a set of favorite or preferred lessons that they enjoy using with students on an annual basis. While only two survey respondents directly mentioned looping as having a negative impact on their multi-age art instruction, the topic is worthy of some attention. As one of these two teachers pointed out, a good portion of his or her planning time was spent “devising ways to not repeat” lessons for multi-age art classes.
The Question of Change

Perhaps the greatest disadvantage presented by multi-age education to some art teachers is that the model of instruction embodies and represents change, itself (Ball, 2002). Furthermore, the concept of change represents a discomfort or difficulty in implementation more so than an actual disadvantage to art teachers. There is some indication in both survey and qualitative data that multi-age art education on a functional level may not have to look and feel that different from art instruction in graded contexts. With that thought in mind, I wonder how many of the listed advantages and disadvantages of multi-age art instruction are really the result of the different ways that different art teachers perceive change. To paraphrase Ms. Pratt, aren’t all art teachers always “dealing with so many different levels in a group of children anyway”? Is it really a disadvantage to children if an art teacher is not able to repeat his or her lessons from year-to-year? Or is all of this, on a functional level, primarily just about a change in how particular art teachers organize and plan their art lessons?

Multi-age classroom teachers have been described as professionals who are willing to break away from the traditional paradigms of evaluating and organizing children in U.S. schools (Grant, Johnson, & Richardson, 1996; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Within these descriptions, multi-age teachers have also been characterized as open-minded, creative risk takers. Through Ms. Pratt’s involvement in developing multi-age workshops in the form of the Connections Training, she has noticed that teachers’ openness or resistance to change can often influence their perceptions of having mixed-age groups in their special area classes. “Well, being that I’ve been doing it for so long,” explained Ms. Pratt, “the county has come to me for leadership with art teachers who are struggling [with multi-age implementation]. I’ve been in a leadership position where I’ve tried to open their eyes and let them see the positives of the whole thing. There are a lot of people that just don’t want to change. They want things all the same, and they don’t want to do anything different. They’re comfortable in their own little comfort level. But to me, if you’re in your comfort level, then you’re closing your eyes to other opportunities. So I’m always looking outward.”

“That’s why I try to encourage the teachers that I work with to look at it in positive way. You guys are invaluable to the learning that’s going on at your school . . . I try to make them feel strong about what they’re doing and realize that they are part of the whole puzzle. And without that piece, it’s not going to be complete with a child or with the activities, or whatever. . . . So
I’ve seen all the different reactions to it. And it seems like the people who are more open-minded find it easier to do.”

Erasing the boundaries that separate education into age-specific compartments has just become accepted as the way that schools are supposed to be organized (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In general, reform efforts that represent change or challenge commonly held conceptions of “real school” tend to be rejected. Considering the emerging similarities between graded and nongraded art instruction on a functional level, I have to speculate that many of the perceived advantages and disadvantages listed in this section may be more indicative of, or at least colored by, each individual art teacher’s openness or resistance to change.

**Compatibility of Purpose**

4. How do the purposes of the art educators and the classroom teachers engaged in multi-age education support or conflict with each other?

**Philosophical Compatibility**

Philosophically speaking, multi-age teachers take a child-centered approach to education that expects a variety of different learning styles, rates, and cultures within their classrooms (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Chase & Doan, 1994; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Multi-age teachers tend to believe that it is their responsibility to provide instruction that best meets the needs of such student diversity. Partially due to the fact that this philosophy is not shared by all elementary educators (Anderson & Pavan, 1993), it has been determined that multi-age instruction is not for all teachers (Grant & Johnson, 1996). With this in mind, I wanted to know if the philosophies and purposes of the selected multi-age art teachers were compatible with the philosophies of multi-age education.

Unfortunately the survey data collected on the compatibility of philosophies was generally inconclusive. The first problem that I encountered in analyzing data related to this supporting question centered on the wide range of coded combinations and permutations involved in the art teachers’ responses to their philosophy of art education. Only 11 respondents seemed to subscribe to a single philosophy of art instruction. Altogether I grouped the philosophical responses of the 36 respondents into 19 different categories and combinations of theoretical orientations held by the multi-age art teachers.
Secondly, there was no reason to suspect that a noticeable pattern in philosophies of art education would emerge. Out of the 36 survey respondents, 34 (94.44%) felt as if they did not have a choice in adopting multi-age structures in their art rooms. Therefore, any patterns that did develop in the stated philosophies of the art educators would likely have nothing to do with the fact that they were teaching in a multi-age environment. Essentially, the participants’ philosophies of art education were irrelevant to the reasons why they were engaged in multi-age art instruction. Most of the survey respondents were teaching in a multi-age environment simply because someone told them that they had to. So although 11 respondents (30.55%) described a philosophical stance that aligned itself with a combination of the theories of creative self-expression and DBAE, and that these two philosophies were the most frequently occurring codes within the various permutations, there is no reason to suspect that this pattern has anything to do with multi-age art education. I might have found similar results if I had polled any random grouping of 36 elementary art teachers anywhere in Florida’s public school system.

The next problem in relationship to this research question occurred when I analyzed the responses to a follow up inquiry that asked the art teachers to explain if their personal philosophy of art education conflicted with or was supported by the philosophies of multi-age education. The problem emerged as the majority of respondents were unable to articulate their explanations in such a way that clearly related their answers back to their originally identified philosophy of art education. Instead, most the art teachers responded by mentioning something that they liked, disliked, or were uncertain about multi-age education in general, without out making philosophical connections back to their previous answer. I was only able to identify four responses that had clear connections back to originally identified philosophies of art education.

This lack of connectedness between responses could be a reflection of poor survey design, my inability to interpret implied connections, or the art teachers’ busy schedule and their lack of time to ponder such philosophical issues. The latter possibility, while interesting to note in terms of the state of affairs of public school art teachers, remains beyond the scope of this study. There is some evidence, for whatever reason, that this philosophical issue may have been the most confusing item of consideration within the entire questionnaire. A total of 14 of the 36 art teachers (38.88%) either didn’t respond, didn’t know, or checked “neither” in response to the inquiry about philosophical support or conflict. There were also 14 respondents who felt that the
theories of multi-age education supported their personal philosophy of art education. There were 8 respondents (21.62%) who felt that the theories conflicted each other.

Ms. Pratt’s coded survey response to this question showed her philosophies of art education to be in alignment with the combined theories of DBAE, integrated arts, and a standards based approach to art education. Indeed, data analysis from the field research revealed all three theories played a role of some sort or another in Ms. Pratt’s instructional repertoire and planning considerations. The disciplines of art came into play during her art museum activities and in the some aspects of the Giuseppe Arcimboldo *Fruity Faces* lesson. An integrated arts approach was used frequently at Rexrode Elementary, usually at a thematic level with some subject area skills occasionally embedded within that structure. Both qualitative observations and interviews showed Ms. Pratt’s awareness of Florida’s *Sunshine State Standards* (YOUR Florida Department of Education, 2005) and how she utilized these objectives in forming a three-year cycle of lesson plans. The multi-age framework did not appear to interfere with her ability to tap into the three theories of art education that she ascribed to philosophically. Although the data on the compatibility of philosophies was largely inconclusive, I will again suggest that perhaps the art teachers’ openness or resistance to change may be just as an important factor in support or opposition of multi-age structures as perhaps any held philosophy of art education.

**Organizational Compatibility**

I will briefly mention, as the topic has been covered in other areas in this chapter, that the organizational purposes of some multi-age team teachers do not always match well with the organizational purposes of multi-age art educators. It stands to reason that the flexible regrouping practices of multi-age team teachers matches well with their purposes of addressing the changing developmental and interest needs of their students as they move into new units of instruction. It also stands to reason that having a consistent group of multi-age students on a regular basis matches well with the purposes of nongraded art teachers who have a limited number of sessions with each group of students, but a myriad of State mandated expectations to meet within that limited time span. So while both organizational purposes appear to be sound, it also appears that both organizational structures may not always be compatible. I am not suggesting that one purpose should be altogether abandoned and surrendered to the purposes of the other. I am only once again pointing out that the flexible regrouping practices of multi-age team teachers that lead to inconsistent art rosters do offer some incompatibility with the purposes
of some multi-age art teachers. Suggested solutions and options for addressing this incompatibility will be reviewed and introduced as I draw implications both for those who plan multi-age programs of instruction and for those art teachers who find themselves working at multi-age school sites.

Conclusions

What qualities characterize art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts from the State of Florida, and what are the implications for structuring and implementing multi-age art education in other Florida schools?

In consideration of the lack of information and research available to art teachers working at multi-age school sites, the primary purpose of this research project was to explore the qualities that characterize visual art teaching in selected nongraded schools from the State of Florida. The results of data analysis showed that most of the multi-age art classes under investigation consisted of two or three consecutive grade level combinations that were primarily, but not always, taught by teams of teachers. The size of the multi-age classes did not, in general, appear to be unusually large or small in terms of student enrollment. Qualitative observations indicated that these multi-age groups could arrive in art class in any number of organizational groupings. Some multi-age homeroom teachers could send their students to art by heterogeneously arranged mixed-ability groups or by developmental-level groups related to a particular subject area such as math or language arts. In the case of team-taught multi-age classes, there were even cases where the flexible regrouping of students from one multi-age homeroom teacher to the other would result in inconsistent art room rosters even in the middle of ongoing art projects. Overall, the art teachers themselves did not seem to play a large role in the organizational structure of their multi-age classes in comparison to the decisions of the homeroom teachers and the greater structure of the multi-age schools in general.

The surveyed multi-age art educators appeared to be very diverse in terms of their descriptive backgrounds, with few obvious patterns resulting from the survey data. The two most overwhelming common characteristics shared among this group of art teachers was that the majority of them had little say in their involvement in multi-age structures and that they had also not received useful training on multi-age instructional practices. In spite of the lack of training and professional autonomy offered to the multi-age art teachers, the nature of their experiences
was one that was surprisingly supportive. The majority of survey respondents expressed their overall support of multi-age grouping in elementary art classrooms.

Both the analysis of survey data and field research showed multi-age art education to offer a learning environment in which the use of scaffolding techniques and thematic instruction resonate equally well as they do in other multi-age classrooms and in multi-age literature. Multi-age models of art instruction do not require that art teachers follow a prescribed curriculum (Serig, 1995) and it would seem that the model is open-ended enough to allow for the absorption and assimilation of many sound instructional techniques and strategies found in traditional graded art rooms. On a functional level, then, multi-age art instruction may not have to look that different than instruction found in many typical art classrooms. Both models of instruction have to address the presence of students from a wide variety of developmental levels within its class rosters. Qualitative observations within a multi-age art classroom held a certain feeling of sameness to it in terms of the structure of art lessons and the way that lessons were delivered.

Observations from the multi-age art classroom at Rexrode Elementary School and literature on multi-age art education (Serig, 1995) indicate that the use of open-ended theme-based lessons allows students to explore such themes at their own pace and at their own developmental and readiness levels. When describing a thematically integrated art project on the topic of geographic conditions, Serig noted that “the openness planned into this project to accommodate the wide variety of abilities and interests added to its acceptance. Instead of focusing on a specific skill and expecting all children to be able to handle it, this project was concept driven. I was then given the opportunity to teach specific skills to children at the appropriate level for their ability, customizing the learning of technique to the individual while still engaging the entire class in an exploration of the same artistic concepts” (p. 117). Likewise, the field research conducted for this dissertation indicated that theme-based lessons allow students to approach a task or art activity at their own developmental levels. Skills, techniques, art history, and art criticism were still addressed, but they were utilized within a conceptual framework that allowed children to make artistic products based on the chosen theme at their own level of artistic development.

By far, the most frequently expressed advantage of multi-age art instruction as reported by the surveyed art teachers related to the model’s use of scaffolding techniques, such as peer assistance, peer tutoring, and cooperative grouping. The primary participant in qualitative
studies and a handful of survey respondents also indicated that there were great advantages in the use of thematic instruction for both students’ learning and the ability of art programs to contribute to school-wide goals. Art teachers working at such multi-age school sites may see a reduction in the amount of weekly lesson plans they generate as a result of teaching to wider developmental groupings rather than grade-specific classes.

By far, the most frequently expressed disadvantage of multi-age art instruction as reported by the surveyed art teachers related to the perception that the span of differing developmental levels within multi-age art classrooms was too great. Additionally, the flexible regrouping practices of multi-age team teachers also presented difficulties for some multi-age art educators. These specific difficulties emerged when different students arrived to art class with different classmates on any given week as a result of regrouping. This fluctuation of students was inconvenient for some multi-age art teachers, especially when the movement of students interrupted the continuity of lessons in the middle of ongoing art projects. The multi-age practice of looping, or students staying with the same teacher(s) for a prescribed period of years (Kasten & Lolli, 1998), also presented difficulties for the established habits of some art teachers as they could not use the same lesson plan over and over again with the same class in consecutive years. Art teachers could not repeat specific lessons with the same multi-age class until a set looping cycle had ended, or else students would be creating the same project again and again.

Considering the emerging similarities between graded and nongraded models of instruction, it is possible that many of the perceived advantages and disadvantages reported by the surveyed art teachers may be indicative of each individual art teacher’s openness or resistance to change.

The findings of this research study were largely inconclusive on the issue of the compatibility between the philosophies of art education held by the survey participants and the philosophies established by multi-age education. The majority of respondents were unable to meaningfully explain how their personal philosophy of art education conflicted with or was supported by the philosophies of multi-age education. Instead, most of the art teachers responded by mentioning something that they liked, disliked, or were uncertain about multi-age education in general, without making philosophical connections back to their originally stated theoretical orientation toward art education. This lack of connectedness between responses could be a reflection of poor survey design, my inability to interpret implied connections, or the art teachers’ busy schedule and their lack of time to ponder such philosophical issues.
Finally, the data collected through field research methods revealed an emerging contradiction within the tenets of multi-age education that occurs when special area teachers are given a choice as to their participation in nongraded models of instruction. Organizers of multi-age models of education that decide to give music, art, and P.E. teachers a choice in having mixed-age groupings in their special areas of instruction run the risk that these teachers may decline to participate. The ramifications of such a decision will most likely result in grade level distinctions and delineations as multi-age groups are split apart into grade level groups to attend special area classes. The use of grade level distinctions is to be banished according to the philosophies of multi-age education as stated by Kasten and Lolli (1998). With this possibility in mind, organizers of multi-age education may decide instead to avoid such grade level distinctions by not offering special area teachers a choice as to their willingness to participate. As a result, such organizers would be mandating multi-age models of instruction on special area teachers, a policy that is to be prohibited (Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Otto, 1969). These contradictions (see Figure 20) are really issues for administrators and organizers of multi-age education to ponder rather than art teachers themselves, although art teachers will most certainly feel the ramifications of such issues.

In consideration of these conclusions, I will use the next section of this dissertation to offer my suggestions for implementing and fostering multi-age models of art education at the elementary level in Florida schools that plan to adopt or refine the model. Then I will review and address the irreconcilable difference presented within the doctrines of multi-age education in regard to the involvement of special area teachers. Finally I will present a suggested continuum of development for art teachers who find themselves working at multi-age school sites. The continuum will trace the options and possibilities presented to multi-age art teachers from entry points at a functional level to a fully immersed conceptual level.

**Recommendations and Implications**

(a) *Through the use of carefully designed staff development training, art teachers must be properly introduced to the underlying concepts of multi-age education and the impact that this organizational model may have on their art instruction. Under ideal circumstances this training should occur before multi-age groups of students ever enter the art teachers’ classrooms.*
One of the most glaring statistics to emerge from the survey data of this research project revolves around the fact that only 3 of the 36 art teachers (8.33%) reported receiving training that was specifically designed on the topic of multi-age education. Art teachers, as well as other special area instructors, should be included in the organizational stages of planning multi-age classrooms and multi-age schools (Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Training should be arranged for such special area teachers as early in the implementation process as possible. “Nothing is worse than learning through rumors that you will have to accommodate two ‘grade levels’ of learners at the same time” (Kasten & Lolli, 1998, p. 81). During the early stages of implementation it should not be assumed, as it was in Ms. Pratt’s district, that special area teachers “won’t get much out of” training, nor should it be only “the largest group” of teachers that “gets dealt with first.” Multi-age art teachers are part of the “largest group.” They are a part of the multi-age team and should be provided immediate and appropriate training. Districts should not provide substitute teachers for some team members to attend a training while other team members are not even invited to the game, let alone left sitting on the bench. From Ms. Pratt’s perspective, the provision of appropriate staff development workshops was a positive step in the right direction toward providing art teachers with a common understanding in multi-age education.

I am not suggesting that art teachers necessarily need to sit through hours of training on, say, the impact of multi-age education on a mathematics, science, or language arts curricula (although such participation would likely be harmless and may actually be helpful in providing art teachers with a holistic view of multi-age models of instruction). I understand that educators can often become frustrated when sitting through long workshops and meetings that may not seem to be directly relevant to their specific situations and subject areas. At times however, it is probably useful for art teachers and other special area educators to attend the introductory portions of multi-age workshops with the homeroom teachers at their school sites in order to build team unity and to provide for common understanding of multi-age concepts. Separate break-out sessions or entirely separate trainings could be arranged for special area teachers to attend while homeroom teachers address the needs of the subject areas that they teach. However, since the organizational structure of multi-age homerooms directly impacts the way that such mixed-age groupings arrive to special area classes, the results of this study suggest that the training of homeroom teachers includes portions that explain how their grouping practices affect the consistency of the rosters of their colleagues in the subject areas of music, art, and physical
education. Such training sessions could, once again, be provided with both special area and homeroom teachers in attendance as a large group.

Although the question of mandating multi-age structures to art teachers is one to be addressed later in this chapter, it seems reasonable that art educators who find themselves teaching to mixed-age groups should be required to attend appropriate training. In my experiences as an educator, I have noticed that it is not uncommon for school administrators to require attendance at trainings that have direct relevance to the entire school or to specific individuals. Over a decade ago, I worked at a school site that had just implemented the then-revolutionary system of passing along all important school information via e-mail rather than typed or handwritten memos. The entire school staff was required to attend a training that explained what this “e-mail thing” was and how we could use it. The principal did not simply plop a computer in each staff member’s room and instruct us to go forth and e-mail. We needed to first understand what the new mechanism of intra-school communication was and how to use it to our advantage. Likewise, administrators should not simply plop mixed-age groups in an art teacher’s room and instruct them to go forth and scaffold. Once the decision has been made that art teachers will be involved in multi-age education, it is appropriate to require such teachers to attend training. Although there will always be some who resent mandatory participation in training, such required attendance may be a better option than voluntary participation as implied by the low attendance of art teachers at the Connections Training in Ms. Pratt’s school district.

Finally I will note that this call for training is not a new addition to the recommendations listed in existing multi-age literature. Others have noted that staff development workshops and training are necessary in the implementation process of multi-age structures (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 1991; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). Still others have specifically suggested or implied that art, music, P.E., and other special area teachers should be included in this training process (Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). My recommendation, in this case, is merely echoing the voices of others who have written on the subject of multi-age education. Sadly, for most of the 36 art teachers involved in this study, those voices have either not been heard or have been disregarded.

(b) The findings of this study suggest that school personnel should annually disseminate all relevant information regarding the organizational structure of multi-age houses as early in pre-planning sessions as possible. This dissemination should include the traditional grade levels
included in each multi-age house as well as the themes that multi-age teachers plan to study throughout the school year.

If an understanding of multi-age concepts has been established through appropriate training, a multi-age art teacher will next need to consider the organizational structure of his or her own multi-age art program. In order to do this, the art teacher will need to be provided with structural information regarding the developmental organization of each multi-age class and house at his or her school site. A list of each multi-age class or house names should be provided to the art teacher as early in summer pre-planning as possible. The list should include the name(s) of the teacher(s) involved in multi-age instruction as well as the traditional grade levels that make up each multi-age class or house (see example in Table 19). At Rexrode Elementary School, Ms. Pratt was provided with similar information during pre-planning by the school’s office staff. In Ms. Pratt’s case, she usually knew the names and structure of each multi-age house well ahead of time due to her years of multi-age work at Rexrode Elementary and due to the apparent stability of the multi-age classes and their teachers at her school. At other school sites, particularly with newer multi-age structures, the timely dissemination of such information during pre-planning would be a crucial step in the organizational stages of establishing multi-age models of art education.

Along with information regarding the organizational structure of each multi-age house, art teachers should also be provided with a list of themes that the multi-age classes plan to investigate during the school year (see example in Table 20). This list could also be compiled and disseminated by administration and administrative staff, but most assuredly should be distributed to art teachers as early in summer pre-planning sessions as possible. Proactive multi-age homeroom teachers may even be able to provide their special area teachers with lists of classroom themes at the conclusion of the previous school year, particularly if they use their returning students to help plan thematic explorations in advance. Whatever the case, art teachers who are interested in making conceptual connections with the themes used by multi-age classes will now be able to pick and choose those themes that have the most relevance to visual arts (Serig, 1995).
Table 19.  
*
**Fictional Example of Multi-age Class List to be Provided to Art Teacher During Pre-planning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>1st Grade</th>
<th>2nd Grade</th>
<th>3rd Grade</th>
<th>4th Grade</th>
<th>5th Grade</th>
<th>Multi-age House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Umansky</td>
<td>Ms. Swick</td>
<td>Ms. Miller</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discovery Cove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Burke</td>
<td>Ms. Jones</td>
<td>Mr. Floyd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Goal Miners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Spencer</td>
<td>Ms. Davis</td>
<td>Mr. Brown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative Kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Richards</td>
<td>Ms. Kim</td>
<td>Ms. Rose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary Pioneers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bush</td>
<td>Ms. Lee</td>
<td>Ms. Garcia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Magic Minds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wally</td>
<td>→→→</td>
<td>Ms. Mack</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inquisitive Investigators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bliss</td>
<td>→→→</td>
<td>Ms. Dewy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creation Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Kotter</td>
<td>Ms. Wade</td>
<td>Mr. Nate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge Seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Sams</td>
<td>Ms. Jacobs</td>
<td>Ms. Moses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enquiring Explorers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even the most willing art teachers should not feel obligated to connect to all multi-age themes at one time. There are limits to the variety of quality lesson plans that one person can generate in a week’s worth of instruction. Perhaps selecting one theme from each type of developmental group makes for a reasonable plan. Ultimately, though, each art teacher can decide for him or herself how many themes to juggle at one time. After making such selections, art teachers can begin to formulate long-term plans for their thematic art investigations throughout the school year. From a functional standpoint, art teachers are not required to make connections with multi-age homeroom themes. However, the integration of classroom themes, when relevant, is highly suggested considering the benefits experienced by Ms. Pratt, some survey respondents, Serig (1995), and as suggested in multi-age literature (Kasten & Clarke, 1993; Kasten & Lolli, 1998). In cases where multi-age homeroom teachers have not planned themes for the entire school year, such teachers should be required to update their multi-age
special area teachers in advance as new themes are developed. “Communication with the classroom teachers must be constant to develop themes and tap into interests” (Serig, 1995, p.57).

Table 20.
*Example of a List of Multi-age Class Themes from Fictional Multi-age School Site*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multi-age House</th>
<th>Themes for First Quarter</th>
<th>Themes for Second Quarter</th>
<th>Themes for Third Quarter</th>
<th>Themes for Fourth Quarter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discovery Cove</td>
<td>The Growth of Living Things</td>
<td>Mind and Body Works</td>
<td>Weather Works</td>
<td>Preserving the Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Miners</td>
<td>Changes in My Family</td>
<td>Changes in My Community</td>
<td>Changes in My Country</td>
<td>Changes in the Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Kids</td>
<td>Community Contributions</td>
<td>Life Cycles</td>
<td>Natural Disasters</td>
<td>Volunteerism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Pioneers</td>
<td>Community Contributions</td>
<td>Life Cycles</td>
<td>Natural Disasters</td>
<td>Volunteerism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic Minds</td>
<td>How Force and Motion Change Matter</td>
<td>Systems of Change</td>
<td>Systems of the Body</td>
<td>Systems of the Universe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquisitive Investigators</td>
<td>Around the World in 180 School Days</td>
<td>Africa And Australia</td>
<td>Europe and Asian</td>
<td>The Arctic Regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation Station</td>
<td>Successful Relationships</td>
<td>The Birth of the United States</td>
<td>Florida History</td>
<td>Global Celebrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Seekers</td>
<td>Successful Relationships</td>
<td>The Birth of the United States</td>
<td>Florida History</td>
<td>Global Celebrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiring Explorers</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Where I Live</td>
<td>Changes in the Environment</td>
<td>Leaving a School Legacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dream Team</td>
<td>Patriotism</td>
<td>Government At Works</td>
<td>Heroes</td>
<td>Careers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(c) The findings suggest that in cases where multi-age schools have more than one art teacher and team taught models of nongraded instruction, those who create schedules for special area instructors should attempt to assign entire multi-age houses with the same art instructor.

Multi-age houses that are team-taught are made up of smaller groupings often known as pods. Each pod, though, should not be thought of as an individual class or an individual entity. Pods are really just one small part of a larger multi-age family. Since each pod should not be
treated as a separate class, it seems to make sense to keep the entire house or family with the same art teacher. This policy will also help to ease some of the burden caused when flexible regrouping practices result in inconsistent class rosters for art teachers. In cases where flexible regrouping does occur, the movement of a student from one pod to another will not result in his or her transition from one entirely different art teacher to another. Such a policy should reduce some confusion for the children who have been regrouped. Although the regrouped children may be coming to art class at a different time of day with a different homeroom teacher, they will still arrive to find themselves in the same consistent art environment that they had grown accustomed to. They will not be faced with learning new classroom management policies, new clean-up procedures, or even the unfamiliar personality of a new art teacher. If the multi-age art teacher has been wise with their grouping of developmental lesson plans, the students may not even be abandoning unfinished art projects that they had toiled over for some time prior to the flexible regrouping. This policy would also prevent instances such as the one that Ms. Pratt described where art teachers would “have to go and find [the students’] artwork from the other class or from the other art teacher, or whatever, and that’s cumbersome.”

Not all school schedules are pliable enough to ensure that entire multi-age houses can be assigned to the same art teacher. At Rexrode Elementary, for example, the multi-age houses were so large that they had to be split between Ms. Pratt and Ms. Kahan if all the homeroom teachers were to receive their common planning time. Fortunately, the two art teachers at Rexrode Elementary School worked very closely and very well together. They attempted to keep their art lessons synchronized on similar topics, if not the same art projects. When flexible regrouping did occur between the two teachers, they did not find it to be a major inconvenience. It can not be assumed, however, that every multi-age school may have two art teachers that work so well together and are able to stay on the same thematic page. Some itinerant art teachers may only be at a multi-age school site for a day or two a week and may not have time to make significant long term plans with a teaching partner. Considering these possibilities, it seems wise to suggest that entire multi-age houses remain assigned to a single art teacher when possible.

(d) Considering the results of this study, multi-age art teachers should organize their lesson plans around broader developmental zones, rather than by specific age or grade levels.

With information on the structure of multi-age houses, their intended themes, and an equitable schedule in hand during pre-planning, multi-age art teachers can begin to focus their
attention on the organization of their lesson objectives around broader developmental levels rather than narrow grade levels. Over time, Ms. Pratt had noticed a trend in the way that multi-age groupings tended to come to her for art class. This observation spurred her to organize her art lessons into larger developmental zones consisting of two-grade level combinations. Art teachers who have been provided with accurate information regarding the structure of each multi-age house during preplanning can begin to form similar developmental grouping strategies before multi-age students ever arrive in their art classrooms. This organizational structure can also be amended as the school year progresses and noticeable trends develop in the way that multi-age students are sent to art class.

Plans can always be scaled up or down to meet the needs of individual students in multi-age art classes. I would also add that while adaptations to initial plans are possible, art teachers would be wise to wait some time before making wholesale changes to their originally planned organizational scheme. At Rexrode Elementary School, for example, Ms. Pratt did not notice major flexible regrouping trends until the end of each quarterly grading period.

Once again using Table 19 on page 236 as an example, an art teacher working at this fictional school may be wise to begin the year with just three developmental lesson plan schemes. One set of developmental lessons could address the needs of multi-age classes consisting of students traditionally known as kindergarten students, first graders, and second graders. The art teacher could begin the school year by using this lesson plan scheme with the multi-age houses known as Discovery Cove, the Goal Miners, the Collaborative Kids, and the Primary Pioneers. Another set of developmental lessons could be created for those multi-age houses that consisted of first, second, and third graders. According to Table 19, these classes would include the Magic Minds, the Inquisitive Investigators, and Creation Station. A third grouping of developmental lessons could be arranged for the Knowledge Seekers and the Enquiring Explorers, both of which consist of third, fourth, and fifth graders. The Dream Team, which consists of just fourth and fifth graders, could also be tracked on this third developmental level, but the art teacher may wish to make minor adaptations in the foci of lessons with this particular class if their needs dictate such adaptations.

With this initial plan in place, the multi-age art teacher should be ready to begin the school year. Along the way, the teacher should feel free to adapt his or her developmental plans after some time has passed and both the needs of students and developmental grouping trends of
the multi-age teachers emerge. In many cases, adaptations may not be necessary if the plan is working well for both the art teacher and for the multi-age students. The multi-age art teacher should avoid thinking of each developmental group as a specific grade level. The multi-age developmental group consisting of kindergarten, first, and second graders should not be thought of or treated as, say, a traditional first grade class, although at times such touchstones can be useful in planning. Rather the multi-age pod might be thought of as a group of emergent learners. It is the art teacher’s responsibility to target a general developmental range with art lessons rather than to arbitrarily decide that he or she will teach a certain pod as if it actually were a first or second grade class. Trying to fit a graded model of instruction into a nongraded framework is to force a puzzle piece that might not fit.

(e) The findings suggest that both a theme-based approach to art instruction and the incorporation of scaffolding techniques are effective and may help to avoid disadvantages experienced by multi-age art teachers who become frustrated working with wider developmental spans.

The analysis of multiple data sources involved in this research project has shown that both the use of thematic instruction and scaffolding techniques resonate equally well in multi-age art education as they do in other multi-age classrooms. Using these strategies is highly suggested not just for their apparent educational benefits, but also because they may be useful tools for multi-age art teachers to use when dealing with differing developmental levels. The survey research consistently showed that the most frequently mentioned disadvantage of working with mixed-age groups of art students came in instances where art teachers perceived the differences in student developmental levels to be too great. A cross analysis of survey responses revealed that there may be a fine line or gray area where the presence of differing developmental levels is perceived as an advantage or disadvantage (see Figure 13). While art teachers certainly may be able to teach mixed-age groups of students on a functional level without using thematic instruction or scaffolding techniques, they might also be overlooking two of the most accessible, if not beneficial, solutions to the conundrum presented by the perceived advantages and disadvantages of working with differing developmental levels.

Literature on multi-age art education (Serig, 1995) and the field research at Rexrode Elementary School indicate that the use of open-ended theme-based lessons allows students to explore such themes at their own developmental levels and at their own pace. Considering the
success of thematic instruction in both situations, this approach appears to offer the best solution for those multi-age art educators who may be struggling with the presence of differing developmental levels within their art rooms. A thematic approach accounts for wide varieties in developmental levels and, therefore, offers an escape route not just out of the gray area between the advantages and disadvantages presented by differing developmental levels, but perhaps out of the entire disadvantage itself (see Figure 21). While creating conceptually based art projects is not always an easy task (Serig, 1995), current trends in art education have left many resources for art teachers to draw from when developing theme-based lessons that explore big ideas and essential questions (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Arnold, 2005; Daniel, Stuhr, & Ballengee-Morris, 2006; the Ohio State University TETAC Mentors, 2002; Sandell, 2006; Villeneuve & Erickson, 2004; Walker, 2001; Walling, 2006).

If multi-age art teachers still experience difficulties in reaching differing developmental levels even within the context of thematic instruction, they would be wise to remember how successful the use of scaffolding techniques appears to be in mixed-age art settings. If a younger student in a multi-age primary house is struggling with a certain skill set, perhaps cutting with scissors, this situation presents an ideal opportunity for art teachers to encourage more proficient learners to become peer tutors and assistants. Observations from a multi-age art room have suggested that such peer interaction can have tri-directional benefits involving the student receiving assistance, the student assistant, and the teacher’s ability to manage a busy classroom. But I am not suggesting that multi-age art teachers should only use scaffolding techniques as a last resort when differing developmental levels become difficult to manage. Scaffolding techniques should be embedded within multi-age instructional practices on a consistent basis. There are many benefits to presenting students with collaborative studio projects in any art room (Hurwitz, 1993). However, opportunistic art teachers can take advantage of situations when students on emergent developmental levels are struggling. The use of scaffolding techniques can turn potential negative situations into positive ones.
Figure 21. Proposed use of thematic instruction as a strategy for dealing with the presence of differing developmental levels.

(f) The findings of this research project suggest that multi-age art teachers should coordinate the repetition of their art lessons with the established looping cycles of the nongraded classrooms at their particular school sites. Art teachers should not repeat specific art lessons with specific multi-age houses until the predetermined cycle has passed.

The multi-age practice of looping, or students staying with the same teacher(s) for a prescribed period of years (Kasten & Lolli, 1998), has a direct impact on how art teachers organize their lessons from year-to-year. Looping creates a situation where an incoming student to a multi-age class will remain within the same multi-age house and with the same teacher(s) for a set number of years. According to the survey data, most typical looping cycles will last for a period of two or three years. With that in mind, multi-age art teachers cannot repeat the exact same lesson year after year to the same multi-age house as they might with traditional graded classes. If multi-age art teachers attempt to repeat the same lesson with the same house year after year, they will quickly find that some students end up making the same project for three years in a row.
Art teachers can look at the list of multi-age houses provided to them during pre-planning (see Table 19) and immediately recognize how long looping cycles for each multi-age house are intended to be. In the examples provided by Table 19, the Discovery Cove class would presumably be on a three-year looping cycle because that particular multi-age house consists of three traditional grade levels. In fact every class within Table 19 appears to be on a three-year cycle except for the Dream Team, which only consists of two consecutive grade levels and would therefore be on a two-year cycle. While the art teacher could certainly track the Dream Team separately, it might seem more efficient and more consistent to keep them on the same three-year cycle as the other multi-age houses. In the cases provided by Table 19, then, the multi-age art teacher working at this fictional school would not be able to repeat a specific lesson until a three year period has passed.

Ms. Pratt envisioned a scenario in which art teachers could collectively create, store, and catalog years of art lessons to be used as resources once three-year cycles of instruction came to an end. Multi-age art teachers could use a similar strategy, on a personal level, if they are concerned that they might forget what lessons they have already covered during a two or three year period. During the first year of multi-age instruction, the art teacher could place each set of written lesson plans and accompanying resources in separate labeled folders at the conclusion of each thematic investigation. Each folder could then be placed in a larger crate or similar storage device that was labeled with the appropriate school year on the outside. The next year, new lesson folders could go in a new crate labeled with the new year, and so on. At the end of the two or three-year cycle, the art teacher could then return to the original crate and (in the words of Ms. Pratt), “repeat all those lessons or . . . throw out the ones that didn’t work and put in some new ones.” Using a cataloged system, such as the one that Ms. Pratt envisioned and I have just described, is not the only way that multi-age art teachers can organize their looping cycles. But considering the hundreds of students that most elementary school art teachers see in a week, it seems advisable to have some sort of organized system for keeping track of what lessons have been used during two and three year periods.

Although the exact same project cannot be taught from year to year, it is perfectly acceptable and perhaps highly likely that many skills, concepts, and media will be reintroduced and reviewed during looping cycles. There is certainly more than one way to make a print, use paint, handle clay, look at art, talk about art, or even explore different aspects of the same artists’
work. In an attempt to not repeat lessons, multi-age art teachers shouldn’t feel like they have to reinvent the wheel from year to year. There are always multiple vehicles that can be used to drive a lesson to its intended objectives. In the case of thematic instruction, different themes will be used from year to year but the students will most assuredly use some of the same media, skills, and techniques to address these open-ended units of investigation.

(g) The findings suggest that in cases when school schedules allow it, multi-age team teachers who use flexible regrouping strategies should take five or so minutes out of their busy schedules to revert back to consistent homeroom groupings before sending their students to art, music, or physical education classes.

It has been well established in this research study that the flexible regrouping practices of multi-age team teachers can result in inconsistent class rosters for art teachers at nongraded school sites. While I will make more than one suggestion for dealing with this inconvenience to art teachers, I will direct the first suggestions toward the multi-age homeroom teachers themselves. In cases where school schedules allow it, multi-age team teachers could switch back to their original homeroom groupings that, in theory, have consistent mixed-age rosters before sending their students to special area classes such as art. If multi-age team teachers take five or so minutes out of their busy schedules in order to make this reversion back to homeroom pods, the negative effects of flexible regrouping on the rosters of art teachers can be eliminated. Art teachers can then concentrate on their multi-age instruction without having to worry about which students will be yanked or added to their rosters in the middle of ongoing lesson plans and long-term projects. While flexible regrouping is an established practice of multi-age education (Cushman, 1993), having the continuity of lesson plans inconvenienced by the addition and subtraction of students without input from the primary instructor involved is not.

Time is precious for general classroom teachers just as it is for art teachers. Much instructional time can be lost in transition and few teachers would care to add more transitions to their day than necessary. It is understandable that homeroom teachers might not prefer to add another transition to their day in order to revert back to homeroom groups for the sake of special area teachers. However, elementary art teachers deal with constant transitions too. Counting clean up time and the distribution of materials, their entire day is made up of transitions. And while adding another transition to the day might not be preferable for homeroom teachers, I wonder what their experience would be like if the shoe were on the other foot. Imagine their
surprise in picking up their students from special area classes only to find out that the art teacher had unexpectedly added or subtracted a few students from their roster. How would this affect a homeroom teacher’s instructional practice and attitude as he or she escorted students back to their pods where ongoing group science projects were awaiting them? How would the homeroom instructor feel if an art teacher added and subtracted students to their rosters on a handful of occasions throughout the entire school year?

But school schedules are complex structures and many multi-age school sites will not have schedules that are flexible enough to allow for this reversion back to consistent homeroom rosters. School schedules that have not coordinated common planning times for their homeroom teachers would likely lack the flexibility to allow for such additional transitions. School schedules that have art, music, and P.E. classes of varying lengths would also present situations where it would be difficult to equitably add transitions back to homeroom groupings for multi-age team teachers. In consideration of such situations where teams of teachers cannot revert back to consistent homeroom groups before going to special area classes, I will make additional suggestions that will help to ease the potential burden caused by flexible regrouping.

(h) In cases where flexible regrouping is unavoidable and leads to inconsistent rosters for special area teachers, multi-age homeroom teachers should inform art, music, and P.E. teachers of these switches with as much advance notification as possible.

If flexible regrouping must occur in such a manner that it affects the consistency of art room rosters, then art teachers and their special area colleagues must be informed in advance of such upcoming transitions in the make-up of multi-age pods. In one of our many conversations, Ms. Pratt confessed to me that “some teachers are very good about letting us know if they have a new student or transfer students. Some don’t . . .” It was of course the latter case that caused more inconveniences for the art teachers at Rexrode Elementary as it left them off-guard and unexpectedly searching for artwork or perhaps transition and extension activities for those students who had been regrouped. If nothing else, homeroom teachers should inform special area teachers of such changes in rosters as a matter of respect and courtesy to the other professional members of their multi-age teams. Teachers working in multi-age environments should expect just as much cooperation and communication among themselves and they do with their mixed-age groups of students.
It is suggested that art teachers structure their lesson plans so that all pods within the same multi-age house are engaged in the same, or at least similar, units of instruction at the same time. While this strategy is recommended in all nongraded situations, it becomes particularly useful in instances where flexible regrouping is unavoidable and prevalent.

While this recommendation can be practically applied to the issue of flexible regrouping, it has conceptual origins in the notion that each multi-age pod is not actually an individual class unto itself. As discussed previously, each pod should be thought of as just one member of a larger multi-age family or as just one room in a larger multi-age house. Viewing nongraded houses as mixed-age families that learn from each other and explore common thematic ideas together reinforces the notion that they should be exploring common themes in the art room too. Art teachers who choose to integrate with multi-age homeroom themes can literally see that the entire house is studying the same theme and that those concepts can be applied across pods or developmental groupings in the art curricula as well. Although each pod will be investigating the same concepts, it is appropriate for the art teacher to scale these investigations up or down to meet the readiness levels of the students in each pod just as it would be in any classroom, multi-age or otherwise.

The policy of keeping entire multi-age houses on the same or similar thematic explorations has practical benefits to art teachers who experience inconsistent art rosters as the result of flexible regrouping. As long as students within the same multi-age house are working on a common or similar lesson, there will be little confusion when a child is flexibly regrouped from one art roster to the other. Even in the case of long-term ongoing art projects, this fluctuation of students from pod to pod can be handled very practically with little time lost on the part of the art teacher. Since regrouped children will have already started work on their current thematic project with their previous pod grouping, they can easily resume their work when they are moved to a different pod within the same house. As Ms. Pratt and I discussed, regrouping then becomes a matter of occasionally assigning a few children new seats and perhaps a new place to store their artwork. Little, if any, continuity will be lost in this process since the regrouped children were already exploring the same theme in their previous pod grouping and because they were not flexible regrouped from one art teacher to the other. As long as team teachers remember to notify their special area instructors of upcoming regroupings and they are not overly frequent or frivolous in moving large numbers of students around, the flexible
movement of students from art roster to art roster should cause little inconvenience to multi-age art educators.

The Irreconcilable Difference Revisited

Within the above recommendations I have attempted to address the major issues and obstacles that were identified in this study for implementing and fostering multi-age models of art education. What remains unresolved, however, is the irreconcilable difference or contradiction that emerges within the tenets of multi-age education when special area teachers are given a choice as to their participation in nongraded models of instruction. In review, organizers of nongraded models of education that decide to give art teachers a choice in having multi-age groupings in their classrooms must face the possibility that these teachers may decide not to participate. The results of such a decision could lead to grade level distinctions, a practice that is to be banished according to the philosophies of multi-age education (Kasten and Lolli, 1998). In an attempt to avoid the creation of grade level distinctions, organizers of multi-age education may instead decide not to offer art teachers any choice as to their participation in multi-age education. In effect, this policy would mandate nongraded instruction on art teachers, a policy that is also prohibited (Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Otto, 1969).

This research project offers no simple solutions to this irreconcilable difference and the issue remains largely unresolved here. I can only offer a suggestion to those administrators and organizers of multi-age education that offer their special area teachers a choice as to their participation in nongraded models of instruction. When special area teachers are presented with such a choice, those who are in the position to ask them for a decision should explain to music, art, and P.E. teachers that they are not expecting nor will they accept an immediate answer. They should instead require such special area teachers to attend training on the topic of multi-age education before accepting their ultimate decision on the matter. With this caveat in place, the special area teachers would at least be making an informed decision in the issue rather than basing their choice on assumptions. The provision of training for potential multi-age art teachers and their colleagues in other special areas continues to loom large in the conclusions of this research project.

A Suggested Continuum of Development for Multi-age Art Educators

Some aspects of the qualitative observations, interviews, survey data, and multi-age literature (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Hunter, 1992) examined in this research project have
implied that multi-age models of instruction do not always have to look and feel that different from effective models of instruction in any classroom situation. When observing Ms. Pratt’s excellent instruction at Rexrode Elementary School, I experienced a certain quality of *sameness* that felt similar to excellent instruction that I have witnessed in traditional graded art programs. However, the literature review also revealed that Serig’s (1995) approach to multi-age art education did contain significant differences from traditional art programs; his model offered children constant choices in materials and in working alone or with groups.

On a functional level, then, multi-age art education does not have to look and feel much different than traditional art instruction. On a conceptual level, however, multi-age art education can be quite different. Based on this realization and the findings of this study, I will introduce a proposed continuum for the development of multi-age art educators that explores the options presented to such art teachers from functional possibilities to a fully conceived conceptual model (see Figure 22). This proposal was created and adapted from an existing continuum (see Figure 1) suggested for classroom teachers and teams of teachers who may be contemplating a gradual switch to multi-age education (District School Board of Pasco County, 1993).

In the event that art teachers find themselves working in nongraded situations, the continuum suggests that there are options that such art teachers can explore and experiment with as they work their way toward the ideal goals of complete nongradedness. Art teachers can enter into the continuum at any point they are comfortable, and should not feel like they necessarily have to start at one end and work their way to the other. Art teachers who do not yet feel comfortable with making more than minimal changes in their instructional practices may decide to enter into the multi-age continuum at the most basic functional level. At this entry level position, art teachers would only have to make three small adaptations to the organizational structure of their art program and could, more or less, continue to teach as they always have. The first adaptation would require art teachers to structure their lesson plans around broader developmental zones rather than by specific age or grade levels. Trying to force graded organizational structures onto nongraded ones simply won’t fit and isn’t appropriate. Secondly, art teachers will be required to coordinate the repetition of their art lessons with the established looping cycles of the nongraded classrooms at their particular school sites. Art teachers working on a functional level will not be able to repeat their lessons until a prescribed looping cycle has passed, otherwise some of their students will continue to make the same project over and over
again, year after year. Finally, art teachers who work with multi-age classrooms that are team taught should structure their lesson plans so that all pods within the same multi-age house are simultaneously engaged in the same, or similar, units of instruction. This strategy is both compatible with multi-age philosophies and will lessen the impact of flexible regrouping, should it occur. With these three minor organizational adaptations in place, art teachers can function acceptably in a multi-age environment and teach in much the same way that they always have.

The next steps in the proposed continuum for multi-age art educators are somewhat interchangeable in sequence and represent different strategies that art teachers can explore as they advance their way toward the goals of conceptual nongradedness. Art teachers who are comfortable with the three initial adaptations presented at the functional level may begin by incorporating the use of scaffolding techniques in their instructional repertoire. This practice could begin as simply as allowing for peer assistance and peer tutoring in cases where some students are struggling with assignments or others finish their work early. Another option for multi-age art teachers to explore is the use of thematic instructional units. Thematic investigations are ideal in multi-age environments as they present learning situations that are open-ended and allow students to explore concepts at their own pace and at their own developmental levels. When multi-age art teachers are comfortable with the use of thematic units, then they may consider the possibility of making curricular connections to the themes explored within the multi-age houses themselves. Ms. Pratt, some survey respondents, and Serig (1995) found there to be great benefits to student learning when thematic connections were explored in the art room. Ms. Pratt also felt as if the use of thematic integration allowed her art program to make greater contributions to the overall goals of her school and school district.

The last step toward complete conceptual nongradedness in art instruction would be to adopt the Serig approach (1995) toward multi-age art education. The suggested approach includes the use of activities, projects, and discussions based on open-ended themes rather than specific skills. Chosen themes presented to multi-age classes should contain direct connections to State standards or local school district curricula and, when appropriate, should connect with the themes addressed within multi-age homerooms. Artistic skills, techniques, and content should still be introduced to multi-age students, but these concepts can be woven into thematic frameworks and should be introduced based on the indicated readiness levels of students. Often students should be given choices in art materials to work with as a way to explore chosen
classroom themes. Student should also be given frequent choices as to whether they would prefer to tackle conceptual investigations as individuals or as collaborative groups.

Figure 22. A suggested continuum of development for art teachers who find themselves working in multi-age elementary environments. The model was created and adapted from an existing continuum suggested for classroom teachers and teams of teachers (District School Board of Pasco County, 1993).

The multi-age continuum meets the irreconcilable difference. While survey data seems to indicate that art teachers are rarely given a choice as to their willingness to participate in multi-age models of art instruction, the introduction of this continuum is significant because it presents art teachers with choices in the extent to which their programs will become conceptually nongraded. The irreconcilable difference identified in this research project has not gone away. However, organizers of multi-age education would now appear to have more options than in the past. Those organizers that do allow special area teachers to accept or decline their participation in multi-age structures should first offer such teachers adequate training and detailed information.
upon which to base their selection. Those organizers that mandate nongraded structures on art educators can now offer such teachers choices as to the extent of their multi-age implementation.

Art teachers who choose to implement multi-age models of art instruction on a functional level, can do so with only minor adaptations in their organizational practices. For the most part, they can continue to instruct art in much the same way that they always have. While the appropriate overall goals of multi-age education should be to push art teachers to adopt the conceptual approach introduced by Serig (1995), the continuum does offer at least some choices to multi-age art teachers, where previously they had none.

Limitations

As a qualitative examination of multi-age art education, this study largely depended on my own sensibilities as the primary instrument for analyzing and making sense of the information that I have collected (Eisner, 1998a). The findings of the study have been filtered through my own personal lens of interpretation as a researcher. Since I observed, analyzed, and interpreted the actions and perceptions of others, my ability to do so became both a guiding strength and a potential limitation of the study (Eisner, 1998a). After studying the subject of multi-age education in depth and conducting an extensive literature review, I also entered into the data collection phases of this study with the perspective that multi-age education appeared to be a viable alternative to traditional graded models of schooling (B. Miller, 1990) for those who may be seeking a change in classroom organizational structures. My point of view included the notion that multi-age education may not be for everyone (Grant & Johnson, 1996) and I had not yet determined how the model of instruction would or would not work for art teachers.

As a qualitative study that used purposive, non-probability methods of data collection, this research project did not make formal inferences to a larger population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). That is to say that inferential statistics were not used to make formal generalizations to all elementary level multi-age art teachers, nor was it the purpose of this research project. One purpose of the survey research was, however, to collect broad contextual information on the practices and perceptions of multi-age art educators in the State of Florida as a way to study the situation in breadth before using other methods to examine the topic in depth. While the surveys did indeed provide the study with broad foundational information, this contextual information could have always been provided on a broader scale. Although both an incentive and reminder
notices were utilized in survey research (Green & Hutchinson, 1996), only 36 of the potential 69 respondents returned completed surveys for a 52.17% response rate. Also the initial snowball sampling technique that located the multi-age school sites could have overlooked additional potential participants, although I only discontinued the snowball search when I felt saturated with results and no new schools had materialized for some time. In short, the broad contextual information collected for this study could have been provided on an even broader scale.

My inquiries into the compatibility between the purposes of the surveyed multi-age art educators and the philosophies of multi-age education remain largely unanswered. In general, the survey participants were unable to articulate how their personal philosophies of art education did or did not relate to the philosophies of multi-age education. Additionally 14 of the 36 art teachers (38.88%) either didn’t respond, didn’t know, or checked “neither” in response to the inquiry about philosophical support or conflict. Whether these inconclusive findings are indicative of the art teachers’ busy schedules that allow them little time for philosophical ruminations or are more reflective of poor survey design, or my inability to interpret the answers is uncertain. Such possibilities, though, are worthy of mention in any discussion of the limitations of this study.

Much was made in this study of the lack of professional autonomy offered to the surveyed multi-age art teachers in terms of their participation in nongraded structures. However, the survey research only reflects the answers of those art teachers who are actually teaching within multi-age structures; they do not reflect the experiences of those who are not. That is to say that there may have been many more art teachers who were given a choice as to their willingness to teach mixed-age groups of students in their art rooms, and these teachers simply declined and therefore were not eligible to participate in the study. In this sense, the survey data only paints a partial picture of the professional autonomy offered to art teachers in potential nongraded situations. This study appropriately addressed the experiences of art teachers working in school sites where multi-age models of art instruction have been implemented, rather than in sites where it has not. I will briefly mention that there were only 4 schools among the 66 first identified in the snowball search that indicated that their multi-age groups split up into grade specific groupings in order to attend art class.

In the process of selecting a site for naturalistic observations, I used the survey results to choose a multi-age art program based on the degree of its nongradedness, the presence of typical
characteristics cited in multi-age literature, and the willingness of the art teacher to participate in observations and interviews. I was purposively selecting a single site for observations with the notion that there is much heuristic value in collecting in-depth information from a specific situation that is unique or exceptional in quality (Donmoyer, 1990). I had no way of knowing that the art program that most typified the characteristics cited in multi-age literature would happen to be taught by an art teacher as skilled and as decorated as Ms. Pratt. In particular, not every elementary art teacher in Florida holds a Master’s degree, has earned National Board Certification, has been nominated and won multiple Teacher of the Year Awards, has received county recognition, is involved in teacher training, and mentors both National Board Certification candidates and Alternative Certification candidates. It is quite possible that Ms. Pratt’s excellence as a teacher may have masked some of the difficulties involved in multi-age art instruction that may have emerged in other situations with a different art teacher with less professional expertise and experience. It is possible that my primary participant in naturalistic observations may not have just been an extraordinary example for matching characteristics in multi-age literature, but may have just been extraordinary in general.

Although inferential statistics were not utilized in the methodology of this research project, that is not to say that the findings of the study only apply to the multi-age art classrooms under investigation. Eisner (1998a) reminds researchers that generalizations are still possible in qualitative research through the natural transference of what has been realized or found in one case to others that are similar in nature. It can be assumed that the findings of this research project hold implications for multi-age education, art education, and for others working in similar situations. Those reading this report will play a role in judging whether the findings are applicable to their particular circumstances.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

While this study reveals much about the qualities that characterize visual art teaching in selected multi-age school sites in Florida, it also reveals a number of other issues that have been left unexplored. The most obvious issue, to me, is that the implementation of multi-age models of organization is not just a situation that deserves exploration from the perspective of art teachers alone; it stands to reason that the creation of multi-age groupings at a particular school site will also impact the professional experiences of music, physical education, and other special
area teachers as well. Many of the organizational tactics suggested in the conclusions of this report would also seem to have some relevance to music and P.E. teachers. However, such organizational tips do little to characterize the nature of music and physical education instruction at multi-age school sites. I wonder what it must be like for these special area instructors to teach in such mixed-age environments. Do scaffolding techniques and thematic instruction resonate well in the music room too? What about physical education? What would it be like to have older, larger students engaged in physical activities with many younger, smaller students at different stages of physical development? There would seem to be much value in conducting additional research studies that examined multi-age education from the perspective of music and P.E. teachers as well.

The naturalistic observations of this research project took place at a multi-age art room that was purposively and partially selected based on its high degree of nongradedness. Findings gathered from the observation of a multi-age art teacher working at a school that is completely multi-age, may or may not be representative of the experiences of art teachers who work at schools that contain just one or two multi-age classrooms mixed in with traditional graded models of instruction. Although the survey data offered a broader picture of multi-age art instruction that included schools that are only partially multi-age in configuration, there could still be much heuristic value in studying the practices of art teachers who are constantly switching back and forth from graded to nongraded models of instruction. I wonder if the emerging quality of *sameness* holds true in these situations or if specific and obvious differences become more apparent.

Much has been made in this research project about the lack of training available to art teachers on the subject of multi-age education. Other than the implied use of the proposed continuum of development for nongraded art teachers as a tool in implementation procedures, this research project did not offer many specific suggestions on the subject of organizing multi-age art education training itself. Naturalistic observations of the Connections Training offered in Ms. Pratt’s school district could be an excellent starting point in developing staff development workshops specifically designed for special area teachers working in multi-age environments. With certain building blocks in place, there would seem to be great potential in involving multi-age art, music, and P.E. teachers in participatory action research that addressed the development of trainings that would be useful to their purposes. If training really only exists in Ms. Pratt’s
school district, there seems to be still another huge remaining gap in the needs of multi-age art educators.

Finally, there are two issues that have remained largely unresolved throughout the course of this research project. The first involves the issue of compatibility between the personal philosophies of art educators and the underlying theories of multi-age education. While this issue deserves continued consideration in further examinations of multi-age art education, researchers may be better served in first investigating the ease with which art educators are able to apply their philosophies to a number of educational situations. Depending on the results, it may be interesting to explore what factors contribute to art teachers’ ability to formulate or partake in philosophical discussions related to their professional practices. The second unresolved issue revolves around the contradiction, or the irreconcilable difference, that presents itself within the philosophies of multi-age education when special area teachers are given a choice as to their participation in nongraded structures. It would appear that this issue deserves further reconsideration on the part of those who are involved in outlining and describing the underlying tenets of multi-age education. This may be a philosophical matter for them to revisit and grapple with first, before proposing any qualitative of quantitative measures to explore such theoretical considerations.

**Summary**

Grouping students by grade level has been the predominant organizational structure of U.S. elementary schools for over 150 years (Goodlad & Anderson, 1959/1987; Hillson, 1969; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). While some teachers appear satisfied with the traditional graded environment in which they work, there are those educators and administrators who continue to seek a paradigm shift in the structural organization of the traditional elementary school system. Such professionals may turn to multi-age models of instruction in order to find a more effective way to scaffold students’ learning.

Multi-age learning environments at the elementary level are loosely defined as the purposive grouping of students from two or more traditional grade levels in order to form a classroom community of learners (Kasten & Clarke, 1993). Students within a multi-age class still move from easier to more difficult concepts as guided by their instructor, but this movement occurs at a pace that is not determined only by their age or grade level. Literature about multi-age elementary classrooms first became prominent between the years of 1955 and 1975 and has
since seen a major spurt in activity beginning in the 1990s (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). Throughout this time period, however, little research has been developed to aid visual art, music, and physical education instructors who may be servicing classes in schools where the multi-age model has already been organized.

To begin to rectify this lack of information, the purpose of this research project was to see what qualities characterize visual art teaching in selected school sites containing multi-age models of elementary instruction within public school districts from the State of Florida. In order to address this problem, I collected information from a select group of multi-age art teachers that I was able to identify through a snowball sampling technique. First I sent out a written survey to all of the elementary-level, public school multi-age art educators in the State of Florida that I could locate as a way to collect broad contextual information on their practices and perceptions as nongraded art instructors. From the survey results, I also selected a multi-age art teacher and observed her nongraded practices as a way to study the situation in depth. I also conducted several interview sessions with the selected multi-age art teacher.

The results of data analysis showed that most multi-age art classes consisted of two or three consecutive grade level combinations that were primarily taught by teams of teachers. Overall, the art teachers did not play a large role in the organizational structure of their multi-age art classes in comparison to the decisions of homeroom teachers. The surveyed art teachers were shown to be very diverse in terms of their descriptive backgrounds. The art teachers’ most common characteristics included that most of them had not received multi-age training and almost none of them had been given a choice as to their willingness to participate in nongraded art instruction. In spite of the lack of training and the lack of professional autonomy offered to the art educators, the majority of them tended to support the use of multi-age groupings in their art rooms. The use of thematic instruction and scaffolding techniques resonated equally well in the art room as it did in multi-age homerooms and in multi-age literature. An emerging pattern in the survey responses and in qualitative data indicated that multi-age art instruction, on a functional level, may not have to be that different from art instruction in traditional graded programs. The most frequently expressed advantage of multi-age art instruction related to the model’s use of scaffolding techniques, such as peer tutoring, peer assistance, and cooperative grouping. The most frequently expressed disadvantage related to the presence of differing
developmental levels in the art room that were difficult to reach because the levels varied too greatly.

The findings of this study were used to develop suggestions for fostering and implementing multi-age models of art education in Florida schools that may be interested in organizing or refining such models at their school sites. Based on the findings from survey research, observations, and interviews, the following recommendations were made for multi-age art teachers, multi-age homeroom teachers, and those who organize and implement multi-age models of instruction.

1. Art teachers should be provided with carefully designed staff development training on the underlying concepts of multi-age education and the impact that this organizational model may have on their art instruction. This training should occur before multi-age groups of students ever enter the art teacher’s classroom.

2. School personnel should annually disseminate all relevant information regarding the organizational structure of multi-age houses to their art teachers and other special area instructors. This dissemination should occur during summer pre-planning. The disseminated information should include the traditional grade levels included in each multi-age class or house as well as the themes that multi-age teachers plan to study throughout the school year.

3. In cases where multi-age schools have more than one art teacher and team taught models of nongraded instruction, those who create schedules for special area instructors should attempt to assign entire multi-age houses with the same art instructor.

4. Multi-age art teachers should organize their lesson plans around broader developmental zones, rather than by specific age or grade levels.

5. Both a theme-based approach to art instruction and the incorporation of scaffolding techniques are highly suggested and may help to avoid disadvantages experienced by multi-age art teachers who become frustrated working with wide developmental spans.

6. Multi-age art teachers should coordinate the repetition of their art lessons with the established looping cycles of the nongraded classrooms at their particular school sites. Art teachers should not repeat specific art lessons with specific multi-age houses until the predetermined cycle has passed.
7. When the school schedules allow it, multi-age team teachers who use flexible regrouping strategies should take five or so minutes out of their busy day to revert back to consistent homeroom groupings before sending their students to art, music, or physical education classes. This would eliminate any and all confusion caused by flexible regrouping strategies that result in inconsistent rosters for special area teachers.

8. In cases where flexible regrouping is unavoidable and leads to inconsistent rosters for special area teachers, multi-age homeroom teachers should inform art, music, and P.E. instructors of these switches with as much advance notification as possible.

9. It is suggested that art teachers structure their lesson plans so that all pods within the same multi-age house are engaged in the same, or at least similar, units of instruction at the same time. If students are switched from one art roster to the other, the art teacher will only need to give the students new seats and, perhaps, new places to store their artwork. The regrouped students can continue to work on their ongoing art projects without losing much, if any, continuity in the lesson.

The findings of this research study did reveal a contradiction that emerges within the tenets of multi-age education when special area teachers are given a choice as to their participation in nongraded models of instruction. If organizers of multi-age education offer special area teachers such a choice, they run the risk of setting themselves up for grade level distinctions. To not offer the special area teachers a choice is to mandate multi-age education on art, music, and P.E. teachers. Both options present the possibility of situations that directly conflict with tenets of multi-age education (Kasten & Lolli, 1998; Otto, 1969). This research project could offer no simple solution to this contradiction within the doctrines of multi-age education. In cases where special area teachers are presented with a choice as to their participation in nongraded structures, it was suggested that they should be required to attend training on the topic of multi-age education before making their decision. This would allow special area teachers to make an informed selection in the issue rather than basing their choice on assumptions.

The research project concluded that multi-age art education does not have to look and feel that different from traditional models of art instruction on a functional level. On a conceptual level, however, multi-age art education can be quite different. With that in mind, I
completed this study by introducing a proposed continuum for the development of multi-age art educators that explores the options presented to such art teachers from functional possibilities to a fully conceived conceptual model (see Figure 22). The continuum suggests that there are options that art teachers can explore as they work their way toward the ideal goals of complete nongradedness. Art teachers can enter into the continuum at any point that they are comfortable, and should not feel like they necessarily have to start at one end and work their way to the other. Art teachers who do not yet feel comfortable with making more than minimal changes in their curricula may decide to enter into the multi-age continuum at the most basic functional level. While art teachers rarely seem to be given an option as to their willingness to participate in multi-age models of art instruction, the introduction of this continuum is significant because it presents art teachers with choices in the extent to which their programs will become conceptually nongraded. As a result, organizers of multi-age education that mandate nongraded structures on art educators can now offer such teachers choices in the form of this continuum. The overall appropriate goals of multi-age education, however, should be to push art teachers to adopt the conceptual approach at the far end of the developmental continuum.

The further development of multi-age models of elementary instruction throughout the State of Florida and the United States leaves much to be considered. While many school reform movements have come and gone (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), the multi-age reform movement has survived for more than four decades and continues to be practiced as a viable alternative to traditional models of elementary classroom organization (B. Miller, 1990). During that time period, very little literature can be found that pertains to nongraded instruction in the art classroom. The suggestions offered in this research study provide art teachers with information and options that could aid them in their decision-making processes. Studies such as this one may also be used to help administrators and other school personnel to organize multi-age classrooms in ways that are mutually advantageous to multi-age homeroom teachers and to the special area teachers who service their nongraded students. In this sense, this research project has even offered some insight or implications to music, physical education, and other special area teachers who also find themselves working in nongraded situations. In any case, the multi-age movement has survived in the U.S. public school system for over forty years. Its continued presence and the lack of attention given to art educators working in that context makes this study, and others like it, necessary, justifiable, and worthwhile.
Teaching Art In A Multi-age Elementary Environment: Practices and Perceptions

Please place a check in the appropriate boxes or fill in the blanks.

I. Background Information

1. Are you currently teaching art to at least one class organized as a multi-age group?
   - Yes  
   - No

   If you answered no, do not proceed further. Please return your survey. Thank you for your time.

2. Do you work at a school site that consists entirely of multi-age classrooms or are only some of the classes multi-age in configuration?
   - Entirely multi-age
   - Some of the classes are multi-age
   - Other, please explain ___________________________

3. How many multi-age classes do you teach art to during this school year? ________

4. What grade levels have been combined in the multi-age classes that you teach?
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________

5. Have you taught multi-age classes in the past?
   - Yes  
   - No

   If you answered yes, please check your years of multi-age teaching experience in the subject area of art.
   - 1-3 years  
   - 4-6 years  
   - 7-9 years  
   - 10 years or more

6. How many total years of teaching experience do you have?
   - 1-5 years  
   - 6-10 years  
   - 11-15 years  
   - 16 years or more

7. Where do you teach art?
   - Your own classroom
   - A portable unit
   - You travel from homeroom to homeroom to teach art
   - Other, please describe ___________________________
8. Were you given a choice as to whether you were willing to service students in multi-age groupings or was the model of organization assigned to you?
   - Given a choice
   - Assigned
   - Other, please describe ___________________________

If you were assigned multi-age art classes, did this assignment occur because you willingly applied for a job at a school where you knew that multi-age classes existed or was the assignment of multi-age art classes unexpected?
   - Willingly applied to a multi-age school site
   - Assignment was unexpected
   - Other, please describe ___________________________

9. What is the approximate number of students in your multi-age art classes?
   - Less than 15
   - 15-20
   - 21-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36 or more students

10. Are the multi-age classes at your school taught by a single homeroom teacher or by a group of team teachers?
    - One homeroom teacher
    - Team Teachers
    - Other, please describe ___________________________

    If the multi-age classes are taught by a team of teachers, do they reorganize or regroup their classroom art rosters throughout the year?
    - Yes  □  No  □

11. What resources do you use frequently when instructing multi-age classes? Check any that apply.
    - Personal computers
    - Audiovisual equipment
    - Teacher’s manual or text written by grade level
    - Classroom space that allows for student grouping
    - Learning centers
    - Individually separated desks where students sit alone
    - Other, please describe ___________________________
II Your Opinions

12. Do any of the multi-age homeroom teachers at your school use theme-based units to deliver instruction to their students?
   □ Yes   □ No   □ I don’t know

If you answered yes, please describe your opinion or stance on tying your art curriculum in with the themes being used in the multi-age homerooms.
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

13. Please describe any advantages you perceive to teaching art to multi-age classes.
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

14. Please describe any disadvantages you perceive to teaching art to multi-age classes.
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

15. Which, if any, of the following instructional methods have you found to be effective in teaching art to multi-age classes? Check any that apply.
   □ Team teaching
   □ Integrative curriculum
   □ Cooperative learning groups
   □ Peer tutoring or peer assistance
   □ Theme-based instruction
   □ Other, please describe __________________________________________

16. Briefly describe your personal philosophy or theoretical orientation toward art education i.e., studio based, DBAE or other content based art education, creative self expression, etc.?
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
17. Do you feel that the philosophies of multi-age education support or conflict with your personal philosophy toward art education?  
☐ Support  ☐ Conflict  ☐ I don’t know  

Please explain your answer.  
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

18. Have you participated in any professional development workshops or trainings that you feel have helped you in teaching art to multi-age classes?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No  

If you answered yes, please list these experiences and why you felt they were helpful.  
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

19. Overall, do you support or oppose multi-age grouping in elementary art classrooms?  
☐ Support  ☐ Oppose  ☐ I don’t know  

Please explain your answer.  
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

20. Phase two of this research project will require the researcher to observe a multi-age art classroom during several regular school days and to conduct three interviews with a multi-age art teacher. If contacted, would you be willing to allow the researcher to interview you and observe your multi-age teaching practices?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No  

Thank you very much for completing this survey. Please enclose the survey and consent form in the stamped, self-addressed envelope provided and mail it promptly. Your time, energy, efforts and cooperation are greatly appreciated.
APPENDIX B
Human Subjects Approval from Florida State University

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763
(850) 644-8673 • FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 11/18/2005

To: Jeffery Broome
1104 Copper Creek Drive
Tallahassee FL 32311

Dept.: ART EDUCATION

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
Teaching Art in a Multi-age Elementary Environment

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Exempt per 45 CFR § 46.101(b) 2 and has been approved by an accelerated review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by 11/17/2006 you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Tom Anderson
HSC No. 2005.299
APPENDIX C

Cover Letter for First Mailing of Written Surveys

Dear Art Educator:

Changes in school organization impact teachers of various subject areas and disciplines. The attached survey is part of a district approved research study that I am conducting for the purposes of my dissertation as a doctoral student in the Department of Art Education at Florida State University. The topic of my dissertation focuses on art teachers’ perceptions of multi-age art instruction in public elementary schools. I would like your opinion on this subject based upon your experiences as an art educator who has taught students organized in such mixed-age groups. While your responses and subsequent summary data may be included in the dissertation, your identity will remain anonymous in the final written report.

Attached to this cover letter, you will also find an additional document entitled, Informed Consent Form For Survey. By signing your signature to this document, you will have given your consent to be a part of the study. Please complete the survey and return it along with the Consent Form prior to the last day of school in December. I have provided you with a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your convenience. In appreciation of your participation in this study, I will conduct a raffle drawing from all of the completed surveys on January 27, 2006. I will draw one winner who will receive a $50 gift certificate from Dick Blick Art Materials. If you wish to participate in the raffle drawing you must complete and return the following items: the raffle ticket entry below, a signed Consent Form, and a completed survey. The winner of the raffle drawing will be announced by e-mail on February 17, 2006.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the e-mail address provided below. Thank you for your participation in this study. I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to receiving your completed survey.

Sincerely,

Jeff Broome
Doctoral Student and Teaching Assistant
Department of Art Education
Florida State University
jlb03y@garnet.acns.fsu.edu

### RAFFLE TICKET ENTRY

<table>
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<tr>
<th>PRINT NAME</th>
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<th>PRINT E-MAIL ADDRESS FOR NOTIFICATION OF WINNER</th>
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APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form for Surveys

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to participate in the research project entitled, “Teaching Art in a Multi-age Elementary Environment”.

This research project is being conducted by Jeff Broome, a doctoral student at Florida State University. I understand the purpose of his research is to better understand the process of and characteristics of teaching art to mixed-age groups of students in public elementary schools. I understand that if I participate in this study, I will be asked questions about my teaching practices in a multi-age elementary environment and my feelings about this practice.

I understand I will be asked to fill out a paper and pencil questionnaire. The total time commitment for the questionnaire will be about 15 minutes.

I understand that my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at any time. All my answers to the questions will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Although quotes from my written response may be reported in the research, my name, or any other identifying characteristics, will not appear on any of the results.

I understand that I may contact Jeff Broome at 850-325-1931 or his directing professor, Dr. Tom Anderson, at 850-644-5473 for answers about this research or my rights. Questions may also be referred to the Human Subjects Committee at Florida State University. The committee may be contacted at: 2035 E. Paul Dirac Drive, Box 15, 100 Sliger Building, Innovation Park, Tallahassee, FL 32310.

I have read and understand the consent form.

__________________________________________                     ________________________
Participant’s Signature               Date
APPENDIX E

First Reminder Notice Letter for Timely Return of Surveys

Dear Art Educator:

I believe that teachers may have the busiest of all work schedules among degreed professionals. I also know from my own experiences that no teacher works harder than the art teacher and that December and January are particularly busy months. In consideration of your busy schedule, I wanted to take a moment of my own time to send a friendly reminder in regards to completing and returning the attached survey on the subject of *Teaching Art in a Multi-age Elementary Environment*. As you may remember, the survey is part of a district approved research study that I am conducting for the purposes of my dissertation as a doctoral student in the Department of Art Education at Florida State University. I would like your opinion based upon your experiences as an art educator who has taught students organized in mixed-age groups. The time commitment for completing the survey is about 15 minutes. While your responses and subsequent summary data may be included in the dissertation, your identity will remain anonymous in the final written report. If you do not deliver art instruction to multi-age groups of children, simply check “No” as your answer to the very first question and please return the survey. In terms of reporting statistical data, it is important for me to know if you have been misidentified as a multi-age art educator.

Once again you will find an additional document entitled, *Informed Consent Form For Survey*, attached to this cover letter. By signing your signature to this document, you will have given your consent to be a part of the study. Please complete the survey and return it along with the Consent Form at your earliest possible opportunity. I have provided you with another self-addressed, stamped envelope for your convenience. As you may remember, I will conduct a raffle drawing from all of the completed surveys on January 27, 2006. If you act quickly, then, there is still time for your name to be entered in the raffle drawing for a $50 gift certificate from Dick Blick Art Materials. If you wish to participate in the raffle drawing you must complete and return the following items: the raffle ticket entry below, a signed Consent Form, and a completed survey. The winner of the raffle drawing will be announced by e-mail on February 17, 2006.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the e-mail address provided below. Thank you for your participation in this study. I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to receiving your completed survey.

Sincerely,

Jeff Broome
Doctoral Student and Teaching Assistant
Department of Art Education
jlb03y@garnet.acns.fsu.edu

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267
Dear Art Educator:

Through professional collaboration and the sharing of ideas, art teachers may find their greatest instructional resources in one another. I personally believe that I have much to learn from you. It is with this collaborative spirit in mind that I am respectfully asking you to reconsider your participation in my research project on the subject of *Teaching Art in a Multi-age Elementary Environment*. As you may remember, the survey is part of a district approved research study that I am conducting for the purposes of my dissertation as a doctoral student in the Department of Art Education at Florida State University. The successful completion of my dissertation depends on the return of a significant number of written surveys. Also in the spirit of collaboration, and in advanced thanks, I have included within this packet a small token of my appreciation. Along with the survey, you will find an enclosed item or two from my own personal teaching collection that I hope you can use as an instructional resource at your school setting. I’m sorry I couldn’t offer more, but the personal expenses of repeated mailings and an earlier raffle drawing have been significant. All I ask in return is that you take approximately 15 minutes of your own time to complete and return a survey.

I will only take a brief moment to remind you that while your responses and the resulting summary data may be included in the dissertation, your identity will remain anonymous throughout the final written report. If you do not deliver art instruction to multi-age groups of children, simply check “No” as your answer to the very first question and please return the survey. In terms of reporting statistical data and establishing a high response rate, it is important for me to know if you have been misidentified as a multi-age art educator.

Once again you will find an additional document entitled, *Informed Consent Form For Survey*, attached to this cover letter. By signing your signature to this document, you will have given your consent to be a part of the study. Please complete the survey and return it along with the *Consent Form* at your earliest possible opportunity, but no later than February 17, 2006. I have provided you with another self-addressed, stamped envelope for your convenience.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the e-mail address provided below. Thank you for your participation in this study. I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to receiving your completed survey.

Sincerely,

Jeff Broome
Doctoral Student and Teaching Assistant
Department of Art Education
Florida State University
jlb03y@garnet.acns.fsu.edu
APPENDIX G

Sample of Returned Survey

The Survey

Teaching Art In A Multi-age Elementary Environment:
Practices and Perceptions

Please place a check in the appropriate boxes or fill in the blanks.

I. Background Information

1. Are you currently teaching art to at least one class organized as a multi-age group?
   [ ] Yes    [ ] No

   If you answered no, do not precede further. Please return your survey. Thank you for your time.

2. Do you work at a school site that consists entirely of multi-age classrooms or are only some of the classes multi-age in configuration?
   [ ] Entirely multi-age
   [ ] Some of the classes are multi-age
   [ ] Other, please explain __________________________

3. How many multi-age classes do you teach art to during this school year? 30 per week

4. What grade levels have been combined in the multi-age classes that you teach?
   K-2 and 3-5

5. Have you taught multi-age classes in the past?
   [ ] Yes    [ ] No

   If you answered yes, please check your years of multi-age teaching experience in the subject area of art.
   [ ] 1-3 years    [ ] 4-6 years    [ ] 7-9 years    [ ] 10 years or more

6. How many total years of teaching experience do you have?
   [ ] 1-5 years    [ ] 6-10 years    [ ] 11-15 years    [ ] 16 years or more

7. Where do you teach art?
   [ ] Your own classroom
   [ ] A portable unit
   [ ] You travel from homeroom to homeroom to teach art
   [ ] Other, please describe __________________________
8. Were you given a choice as to whether you were willing to service students in multi-age groupings or was the model of organization assigned to you?

☐ Given a choice
☒ Assigned
☐ Other, please describe ____________________________

If you were assigned multi-age art classes, did this assignment occur because you willingly applied for a job at a school where you knew that multi-age classes existed or was the assignment of multi-age art classes unexpected?

☒ Willingly applied to a multi-age school site
☐ Assignment was unexpected
☐ Other, please describe ____________________________

9. What is the approximate number of students in your multi-age art classes?

☐ Less than 15
☐ 15-20
☒ 21-25
☐ 26-30
☐ 31-35
☐ 36 or more students

10. Are the multi-age classes at your school taught by a single homeroom teacher or by a group of team teachers?

☐ One homeroom teacher
☒ Team Teachers
☐ Other, please describe ____________________________

If the multi-age classes are taught by a team of teachers, do they reorganize or regroup their classroom art rosters throughout the year?

☐ Yes  ☒ No

11. What resources do you use frequently when instructing multi-age classes? Check any that apply.

☐ Personal computers
☐ Audiovisual equipment
☐ Teacher’s manual or text written by grade level
☒ Classroom space that allows for student grouping
☐ Learning centers
☐ Individually separated desks where students sit alone
☐ Other, please describe ____________________________
Your Opinions

12. Do any of the multi-age homeroom teachers at your school use theme-based units to deliver instruction to their students?
   □ Yes  □ No  □ I don’t know

   If you answered yes, please describe your opinion or stance on tying your art curriculum in with the themes being used in the multi-age homerooms.
   I try to do one project a year on each of the 4 or 5 themes. The project may not be taught at the same time as the theme since each pod teaches the theme at a different time.

13. Please describe any advantages you perceive to teaching art to multi-age classes.
   I find that older students are better behaved in multi-aged classes and help fellow students solve simple problems.

14. Please describe any disadvantages you perceive to teaching art to multi-age classes.
   The skill levels of grades K and 2 are so wide spread that finding projects that are effective with both age groups is difficult.

15. Which, if any, of the following instructional methods have you found to be effective in teaching art to multi-age classes? Check any that apply.
   □ Team teaching
   □ Integrative curriculum
   □ Cooperative learning groups
   □ Peer tutoring or peer assistance
   □ Theme-based instruction
   □ Other, please describe

16. Briefly describe your personal philosophy or theoretical orientation toward art education i.e., studio based, DBAE or other content based art education, creative self expression, etc.?
   I realize that at the elementary level most of my students will not become professional artists. My aim is to provide my students with a common cultural experience that will help them to better relate to the world community. I also try to provide them with an opportunity to exercise their creative abilities and to practice alternative problem solving methods.
17. Do you feel that the philosophies of multi-age education support or conflict with your personal philosophy toward art education?
   ☑ Support  ☐ Conflict  ☐ I don’t know

Please explain your answer.
"Multi-age education supports my philosophy, having a range of ages in the art room makes our study of culture more complete and interesting. I also find multi-age levels stimulate the students’ creativity and problem solving skills."

18. Have you participated in any professional development workshops or trainings that you feel have helped you in teaching art to multi-age classes?
   ☐ Yes  ☑ No

If you answered yes, please list these experiences and why you felt they were helpful.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

19. Overall, do you support or oppose multi-age grouping in elementary art classrooms?
   ☑ Support  ☐ Oppose  ☐ I don’t know

Please explain your answer.
"I enjoy and support the multi-age grouping of my classes, but would prefer having K, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th in the same grade (K-1; 2-3; 4-5)."

20. Phase two of this research project will require the researcher to observe a multi-age art classroom during several regular school days and to conduct three interviews with a multi-age art teacher. If contacted, would you be willing to allow the researcher to interview you and observe your multi-age teaching practices?
   ☑ Yes  ☐ No

Thank you very much for completing this survey. Please enclose the survey, consent form, and raffle ticket in the stamped, self-addressed envelope provided and mail it promptly. Your time, energy, efforts and cooperation are greatly appreciated.
APPENDIX H

Consent Form For Observations and Interviews

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to participate in the research project entitled, “Teaching Art in a Multi-age Elementary Environment”.

This research project is being conducted by Jeff Broome, a doctoral student at Florida State University. I understand the purpose of his research is to better understand the process of and characteristics of teaching art to mixed-age groups of students in public elementary schools. I understand that if I participate in this study, I will allow Jeff Broome to observe my classroom throughout several typical school weeks. I also understand that I will be asked questions about my teaching practices in a multi-age elementary environment and my feelings about this practice. The interviews will assist Jeff Broome in accurately recording the practices, attitudes, and opinions of those who teach art in multi-age elementary environments.

I understand that if I agree to be interviewed by Jeff Broome that I will be participating in three separate interview sessions. Each interview session will take about 45 minutes. I also understand that, if interviewed, I will be audio-taped. These audiotapes will be used by Jeff Broome only, stored in his office, and destroyed upon completion of the project, June 30, 2006.

I understand that my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at any time. All my answers to the questions will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Although quotes from my interviews may be reported in the research, my name, or any other identifying characteristics, will not appear on any of the results.

I understand that I may contact Jeff Broome at 850-325-1931 or his directing professor, Dr. Tom Anderson, at 850-644-5473 for answers about this research or my rights. Questions may also be referred to the Human Subjects Committee at Florida State University. The committee may be contacted at: 2035 E. Paul Dirac Drive, Box 15, 100 Sliger Building, Innovation Park, Tallahassee, FL 32310.

I have read and understand the consent form.

__________________________________________                     ________________________
Participant's Signature               Date
APPENDIX I

Sample of Expanded Fieldnotes From May 3, 2006

The next class to arrive to art is Ms. XXXXX’s pod from the XXXXXX multi-age group of 3rd, 4th and 5th graders. I notice right away that there are some huge size differences in size and height in this class.

*Something makes me wonder (perhaps it’s the size of the students or their mannerisms) if there are some special populations mixed in.*

Ms. XXXX later tells me that this class has a number of students with multiple exceptionalities mixed-in. She says that, at times, this class “really feels like a K-5” class. I count about 22 students. The students come right to the carpeted area, as usual.

**Ms. X:** “Last week you had a substitute. Who can tell me what you were working on?”

**Students:** “Kites.”

**Ms. X:** “What do I want to see on your kites?”

After the brief review of the kite activity, Ms. XXXXX switches gears and moves on to an introduction to the “Art Museum” presentation. In this case, Ms. XXXXX does not have the students write their answers down on a sheet of paper. She later explains to me that the mixture of the special needs students in this class dictates that they do this as a verbal activity rather than a written one.

*So although I have felt like I’ve seen Ms. XXXXX run about two lessons a week (a primary and an intermediate lesson) she does adapt the nature and presentation of these lessons to meet more specific developmental levels. In other words, she scales the lessons up or down to meet the needs and character of the students in each particular pod. This is also seems to fit in well with the multi-age philosophy of developmentally appropriate instruction.*

**Ms. X:** “What do all of these pictures have in common?”

**Student:** “They all have people.”

**Student #2:** “They are all famous pictures.” At this, Ms. XXXXX takes a moment to remind the students that all of the prints on display here are all reproductions and not the “Real McCoy.” She knows full well that the Sunshine State Standards ask students to know the difference between original works of art and reproductions. This Standard is at the primary level, but she takes the opportunity to remind her intermediate students as well.

*Ms. XXXXX does an excellent job of recognizing teachable moments. Since I mention Sunshine State Standards in this passage, I will only briefly hold a space to mention that the Standards are conveniently organized in multi-grade groups as well. So, for the most part, the Standards shouldn’t be a hindrance to instructing students in multi-age groups. However, the State of*
Florida has also created grade level expectations in the visual arts too. So I wonder how such expectations might or might not be problematic for Ms. XXXXX’s art instruction. We have touched on this subject in a previous interview.

She also mentions to the students about the painting, “The Scream”, being stolen again. No one (almost no one) knows where the original is.

Ms. XXXXX makes a smooth transition into the questions about the artwork that she wants the students to respond to verbally.

**Ms X:** “Is there a picture that makes you wonder, ‘What’s going on’?”

**Student:** “#7” (The abstract painting by Picasso that shows the woman with tears.)

**Ms. X:** “Yes, it’s a little more abstract.”

**Student:** “Is she crying?”

**Different Student:** “She’s blowing her nose.” (Well she is holding a handkerchief... why not?)

**Ms. X:** “What pictures look like they are feeling something?”

**Student:** “#6. The one with the guitar.”

**Ms. X:** “Is he sad?”

**Student:** “No. He’s happy.”

One of the students suggests that “The Scream” (the painting) shows a “creepy” feeling. The conversation goes off on a brief tangent about creepy movies such as “Scream” (the movie) and the comedy “Scary Movie”. Ms. XXXXX successfully gets the students back on topic.

One of the students suggests that # 14 also shows some sadness. (This is the picture of the girl playing her cello.) There is a little debate over whether or not this picture shows sadness. Ms. XXXXX allows some of the kids to go up and look closer. Ms. XXXXX says that in her opinion (and she emphasizes that it is just her opinion) the cool colors in the image add an element of sadness. But the instrument (cello?) is depicted with a warm hue. So she thinks that the music brings warmth/happiness to an otherwise sad girl.

Next the discussion moves to the feelings represented in “American Gothic” by Grant Wood. Some of the students say that they have since this painting before on a cartoon. Someone says they have seen it in “Sponge Bob Square Pants.” This prompts another teachable moment where Ms. XXXXX discusses how many images and ideas from the Fine Arts are used in popular culture, such as animation. She points out that all of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are named after Italian Renaissance painters.
Ms. XXXXX follows her instincts and she is ready to wrap up the discussion and move to the kite activity. But some of the kids are really into the discussion and excitedly ask for “ONE MORE! ONE MORE!”

Although it’s not unanimous, it shows how much the kids enjoy talking about art as much as making it.

Students start to work on their kites. One boy’s kite incorporates the outside contour of the image into the design rather brilliantly. His kite shows a baseball diamond. “We beat the team in first place last night,” he says.

Ms. XXXXX does some hand-over-hand work with a girl with a visual impairment (which Ms. XXXXX says is very severe). As Ms. XXXXX leaves the situation, two other girls jump right in and pick up with assistance, right where Ms. XXXXX left off.

This is another instance of peer assistance. At times the inclusion model does seem to accentuate this as much as the multi-age environment.

One of the helping students has a visual impairment, as well. She receives help from others, but is willing to try and help too.

Looking at the students’ artwork, I notice that one student is drawing a castle on his kite. I wonder if the student chose this imagery because it relates to their school theme and renaissance festival. Another student’s drawing is about dancing and still another depicts the student’s love for drawing.

------------------------------------------

LUNCH TIME

From my point of view, a real interesting conversation takes place with the other specialists (music, art, and P.E.) at lunch. They are discussing the multi-age specials’ schedule for next year. Of particular interest is how some of the primary multi-age classes feed directly into certain intermediate multi-age classes. But what really fascinates me is how the specials’ teachers, in private, refer to the classes as their team names even in personal communication.

The team names are indeed entrenched into the school culture as far as how the classes are addressed.

The conversations goes something like this (not a direct quote): “Next year XXXXX (insert pseudonym for team name) will have 5 classes and XXXXX will have 4, so we have to make sure that they… etc., etc.” It’s really interesting to watch, as I’m sure it would sound very odd to an outsider. However the conversation seems to make perfect sense to those embedded in the multi-age structure at XXXXX XXXX Elementary.

------------------------------------------
The XXXXXXX XXXXXXX multi-age class of K/1/2 students comes to art right after lunch. The specific teacher of this multi-age pod is Ms. XXXXXXX.

The students have already gathered on the carpet.  
**Ms. X:**  “Today we are going to pick up something that we started a while ago and we never got finished.”

**Student:** “What about the kite?”

**Ms. X:** “If you get finished you can work on the kite. So we will kind of be doing two things today.”

*Ms. XXXXX has no problems with multi-tasking, that’s for sure!*

Ms. XXXXX begins a review of warm and cool colors. She has a Crystal Brand Color Wheel to use as a reference and as a reminder. Ms. XXXXX shows the students the warm color sheets that they painted earlier.

**Ms X:** “Today we are going to do another one like it, but it is not going to be a picture of anything because it is abstract. Today we are going to do one of the cool colors.”

She has prepared two posters showing examples of warm and cool colors.  
**Student:** “Can you hang those up?”

**Ms. X:** “Yes, so we can see examples to refer to.”

Next Ms. XXXXX does an example/reminder of handling materials for watercolors.

As she gives the demonstrations:  
**Ms. X:** “You don’t’ want to smash Mr. Brush… The more you stir the brush in the water, the lighter it comes out. So if you want it light, this is how you would do it.”

Ms. XXXXX also reviews some management issues such as using smocks, and carrying wet papers to the drying rack… “like- a – de pizza pie” (in a faux Italian accent).

**Student:** “Do the funny voice again! How do you do it?”

Students go to retrieve materials and, even though they are young, they already know the routine for the year. Every one has a smock made out of heavy wallpaper sheets. The sheets are very large and a hole has been cut out of the center. The students simply slip their head through the hole and wear it like a “3 Musketeers” style vest. Before the students retrieve them, they are draped like a saddle over some sort of rack. *I’ve never thought of this idea. It works great! I always pick up new tricks when I watch other art teachers.*

Soon enough, the students are at their tables painting away.
Snippets of Student Conversation: “Look at my pretty water.” “Guys, you should mix the white with the purple. Look how it comes out” “If you want a bluish purple, you should do this.” The students are both experimenting with their materials and sharing their results. These students are giving peer suggestions, advice, and some tutoring.

A student named XXXXX finishes his cool color painting early and even finishes his kite.

Ms. X: “XXXXX, why don’t you help some of your friends who need help stapling. I know that you already know how to do this. She doesn’t know how to do this.”

XXXXX is eager to help and has a bounce to his step as he goes to assist the girl. He is helping her to staple the streamers to her kite.

3rd Student: “XXXXX, I need some help.” And this comes from a third girl who is now seeking out the “expert” too.

This is really interesting to watch. Actually Ms. XXXXX’s strategy of directing XXXXX to help others is beneficial to both time management and classroom management, as XXXXX was a bit off task and running around with his kite trying to get it to fly. Also it seemed to be a big boost to his self-esteem as he took on the role of the expert. He really took pride in lending a helping hand. And the girls felt good about having some help too.

A little Asian girl that XXXXX was able to help is really proud and actually approaches me to show me her work. She is beaming!

Me: “Did XXXXX help you”

Student: “Yes.” She says as she shakes her head and smiles. She has a bounce to her step too as she skips away.

Ms. XXXXX informs XXXXX that he has earned a XXXXXXX Dollar (an incentive program related to the school mascot) and provides him with a small reward. This is the first time that I have seen this reward.

Ms. XXXXX starts to encourage everyone to clean up. They are instructed to hang up their wallpaper smocks like horse saddles.

Ms. X: “I’m going to ask you to clean up your tables and you can get a sweet treat. Time is up.”

Several other students come to show me their kites and the class gets their sweet treats for cleaning up well as they line up at the door.
APPENDIX J

Interview Checklists

Interview #1: Life History

1) Where were you born and where did you grow up?

2) Tell me about your education, starting from elementary school and work your way up chronologically.

3) Can you describe the teacher training program you went through at the time you became a certified art teacher?

4) Describe your professional career in chronological order, including any other jobs you may have had along with being an art teacher.

5) When and how were you first introduced to multi-age education?

6) When was the first time that students came to your art class in multi-age groups?

7) Did the school offer you any training on dealing with mixed-age groupings of students at that time?

8) Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your background at this point?

Interview #2: Details of Experience

1) Describe the school where you teach in terms of location, size, the student population and the community in general.

2) Describe what a typical day is like for you as the art teacher here at ______________ Elementary.

3) Can you describe your art program in terms of curricula? (How much of it is based on county or state standards? How much of it is teacher-driven?)

4) Describe the environment from which you deliver art instruction.

5) Describe what a typical art class is like for you from beginning to end. I’m interested in the flow of the activities as well as the class size and the amount of time allotted.

6) Describe what a typical multi-age art class is like. How many multi-age classes do you see a week? Describe them in terms of size, names, how they are organized, and their character.
7) Describe how your planning or preparations for multi-age classes may be different from how you might prepare for a traditional graded class.

8) Describe your philosophy on thematic integration or tying your art projects in with the themes being studied in the multi-age classrooms.

9) Describe how teaching art to multi-age classes may or may not affect an art teacher’s ability to address Sunshine State Standards.

10) Is there anything else about the day-to-day details of teaching art to multi-age groups that you would like to share with me at this point?

**Interview #3: Reflections on Meaning**

1) How does it feel to be an art teacher who works in an environment that is organized in a non-traditional model?

2) How did it feel when the school (or teachers, or administrators) first approached you about students coming to your art room in multi-age groups?

3) Since that time, ________ years have passed. How does it feel to be teaching to multi-age groups now?

4) How important do you feel it was that your school’s special area teachers were willing to accept multi-age groups into your classrooms?

5) How would it have been different if the special area teachers had refused to accept multi-age groups of students?

6) What is the most rewarding or satisfying thing about teaching art to multi-age groups of students?

7) What is the most frustrating thing about teaching art to multi-age groups of students?

8) (If appropriate…) What does it mean to you to be able to connect your curricula with some of the themes studied in multi-age classrooms?

9) Is there anything else about the instruction of art in a multi-age environment that you wanted to tell me?
APPENDIX K

Sample from Transcribed Interviews

Interview #3: XXXX XXXXX, Art Instructor
XXXXXXX XXXX Elementary School
May 4, 2006

Me: We’re starting the third and final interview at XXXXXX XXXX Elementary with XXXXX XXXXX. And once again I always start off just by thanking you for sharing this time with me. I wanted to start off with and talk some more about reflecting upon everything we’ve talked about the last couple of weeks… and reflecting upon your time as a multi-age teacher. So, in general, how does it feel to you to be a teacher that works in a non-traditional, multi-age environment? How does that feel for you?

Ms. X: Well, I think initially when we first moved into it… It kind of threw me for a loop, as it did with some other people… Worrying about, ok, I want third graders doing a different project than fourth graders and fifth graders. It kind of shook our world a little bit. But as I thought about it and reflected a little bit about it… It was still going to work, even though we went to the multi-age… Because we are dealing with so many different levels in a group of children anyway. It wasn’t so much age-specific, its how you deal with a group of children…period (for emphasis).

Me: Do you mean, because you dealt with a group of levels… thinking of it as K to 5? Or thinking of it within a regular first grade classroom?

Ms. X: Within a regular classroom. Within… like… within a kindergarten, you’ve got kids who are at first grade level. You’ve got kids that are at a pre-K level… developmentally and socially and all these different things. So we already had a mixture of classes… of children, anyway. So, when I look back on it… That’s kind of the way it felt. Now, as I’m looking at it… I can reflect back on it and its actually easier for me to teach the multi-age because I don’t have six different preparations to do everyday. And I look at it more long term. I look at it… I have a couple of years to accomplish all these goal, instead of, “I’ve got to get all of this done in one year”… because of the curriculum that we’ve got. We have three grades in “primary”, and three grades in “intermediate” where we can reach those goals. So we have a longer period of time. So I’m not so pressured. I also don’t have to come up with a different lesson for each specific grade like we used to. And that’s kind of the way we were trained to do it. When you’ve got a seventh grade “Drawing” class, they are going to be doing something different than the sixth grade… you know… “Introduction to Art” class. And the same thing with elementary… We’re going to do different things, but it’s a little more generalized. And it allows me a chance to focus a little bit more broadly and also connecting with the curriculum (indecipherable). It makes it more valuable in a way.

Uh…. How it feels? (long pause) At first, again, I was pretty stressed out about having different grades… trying to figure out, “Oh, how can I do this fifth grade Mask Project”… Again, I’m coming back to that because it’s a perfect example… When I’ve got these third and fourth graders in here and I just can’t do it with them. They are not developmentally ready for it. They don’t have the maturity. They don’t have the skills to deal with it…To use that much
money for something that they are just going to make a mess of… or have the potential to make a mess of. And not be able to handle the stuff going on their face. So that posed, probably, one of largest dilemmas for me… was trying to figure out how to make that work. So, initially, it freaked me out a little bit. And when XXXXX first started teaching out here, she was used to grade-specific.

Me: She came from XXXXXXXXX?

Ms. X: She came from XXXXXXXXX, but she just interned there…. Not interned… She didn’t’ even intern… She just substituted… Long-term subbed there. And that teacher over there has a curriculum that’s so structured; every year the kindergarteners do the same thing (smacks hands in unison with “the”… “same”… “thing”). Every year the first graders do the same thing. And it’s set in stone. And that’s what she is used to. And she came here and said, “What do you mean, we’re going to do the same thing with third graders and fourth graders?”.. or… “What do you mean, the kindergarteners are going to do the same thing as first graders?” So that threw her for a loop. But she has kind of found the wisdom in that… you can reach more than just one grade with a lesson. You can always reach multiple grades with most lessons. But you have to pick things that are appropriate. So then again, you have to plan in advance to know what your goals are.

Me: So the initial feeling sounds like… When they first… When they first started to implement it (indecipherable)… At first it was stressful or… or… you had questions about it. Now, years later, the feeling is more…?

Ms. X: Well, I feel a lot more flexible about the whole thing. But I’ve been doing this for ten years too. And that makes a difference. As well as doing the mainstream. And we’re an “Inclusion School”. And I think that sets the tone, again, for trying new and different things and being more flexible and more willing to have different ages together. Because as an art teacher, I find that it works pretty well. It’s not a drawback… in most situations… in most situations.

Me: And this comes back to something that we talked about in an earlier interview… You felt like the “Inclusion Model” was maybe a nice stepping-stone… or…?

Ms. X: Absolutely. And I think I spoke about that before. Our school is already primed to include kids who have different levels, already. Like our fifth graders are functioning at a first or second grade level… but for socialization reasons they are included with kids their own age. And there was a lot of time spent with these children who are in the regular class, letting them know about that student. That’s critical when you’ve got an “Inclusion” setting, or even when you’ve got multiple ages. It’s critical for everybody to understand that it’s ok to be different. It’s ok to work at your own pace. Its ok, you’re doing your best. Its not… who is doing better, and who is older, and who is younger, and who is a baby… You know… It’s not that. It’s actually a personal thing… what they are doing and what they are doing for themselves. (Mumbles for a brief moment.) And it’s not a judgment sort of thing. And having that idea with the whole assessment… You have to relax it. You have to, when you’ve got a multi-age setting. It’s not fair to compare a fifth grader to a third grader. (Indecipherable) That’s another reason, probably, why I’ve relaxed my assessing, you know. Over time, I’ve come to realize that that’s
not a major focus, as far as giving grades. It’s what they’re doing. It’s what they’re trying. It’s what they’re learning.

**Me:** And along the same lines, how does it feel… maybe… when you interact with other art teachers, maybe, from other places… or even within the county… that don’t have the higher levels…. That haven’t implemented multi-age to the degree that it is at XXXXXX XXXX… How does it feel to just be an art teacher that works in a nontraditional… in a school that may not be organized in a traditional way?

**Ms. X:** Well, being that I’ve been doing it for so long, the county has come to me for leadership with other art teachers who are struggling; who don’t even know what it’s all about, who just don’t get it, and I’ve been in a leadership position where I’ve tried to open their eyes and let them see the positives of the whole thing. And you know as well as I do there are a lot of people that just don’t want to change.

**Me:** Sure.

**Ms. X:** And they want things all the same, and they don’t want to do any different; they’re comfortable in their own little comfort level. But to me if you’re in your comfort level, then you’re closing your eyes to other opportunities, and so I’m always looking outwards, and that’s why I try to encourage the teachers that I work with is to look at it in a positive way. You guys are invaluable to the learning that’s going on at your school, and by going along with this curriculum, you are making yourself that much more invaluable, because you’re just as valid and just as important as the classroom teachers. We’re all doing the same thing. So I really try to pat their backs and, you know, make them feel strong about what they’re doing and realize that they are part of the whole puzzle, and without that piece, it’s not going to be complete with a child or with the activities, or whatever.

So, I know that there are a lot of teachers… I’ve dealt with a lot teachers who are just stubborn, and they just don’t want to take the time or trouble to learn it, so I’ve seen quite a range of reactions toward this whole thing. And a lot of it is the school culture. It really is.

**Me:** It seems like there’s a positive school culture…

**Ms. X:** We have a very positive school culture, and there’s some schools where the principals don’t even want to be bothered…

**Me:** (Laughing) Right.

**Ms. X:** And eventually, they’re being weeded out, and moved along, you know, to whatever so that people who are… I’m going to say enlightened… but, you know, who are more willing to be flexible and try these things that research has shown works (indecipherable) take their place. So I’ve seen all the different reactions to it, and it seems like the people who are more open-minded, and I don’t want to say just intelligent… but that are able to handle deeper things find it easier to do than people who are just … they’re just doing a job and they don’t have that drive, and they don’t have that sponginess about them where they want to soak things up and learn new things. It’s must easier to work with people like that. So a lot of it’s the culture, and a lot of it’s site-based management, which our county focuses on, and how well that’s being integrated
(indecipherable). There’s still a couple of schools around that are really struggling still. And a lot of them are older schools, they weren’t built with this new philosophy and their principals and their teachers have been around so long they’ve got their heels in the ground. You know, they don’t want to change.

**Me:** Do you enjoy having… like being involved in XXXXX (a training) and do you enjoy having a leadership position? Does that bring about a positive or …

**Ms. X:** Well, I like… I like to think… of course, I’m very stressful in front of my peers. Everybody is. You know, that’s common, and it’s like oh, my God, they’re going to think I’m so (unintelligible). But I enjoy it because I feel like I bring a lot to the table, and because I can be very positive, and because I can… I’m a real good spinner. I can find the good things in just about anything. I have a positive outlook on life, and there’s always good things happening. Even if it’s a bad situation, there’s something comes out of it in a positive way, so I allow the teachers at the discussions to say their negative things, but then we try to rephrase it, and we try to repose it and try to see it in a different light and make that a good thing or let them see the different ways this can be deal with, and I think that’s critical. Again, going back to something I said a long time ago… which having a support for new teachers and having support there and the mentorship is critical for new teachers especially. But then those teachers who maybe are out of school, and they’re not interested… you know, have that link, and that’s why things are so important for us … art teachers to be connected across the county, because when you’re in one school, and you just see that way of doing it, it’s real easy to think that’s the way the whole world is. So, I think it’s really critical and to give an example of why… If our county has adopted this, we need to go forward, and we need to try implement it, you know, positively and make it as painless as possible for the people who are trying to implement it.

**Me:** And the leadership position for you is positive as well?

**Ms. X:** For me… I try to have it positive for me. I enjoy it. I feel like I’m making a difference, and I think that’s why most teachers teach because we feel like we’re making a difference. And it’s nice to have gotten to the point where I feel like I have enough knowledge and skills to share with my peers and also new teachers and even doctoral students. (Breaks out in laughter!)

**Me:** (Laughing hard too!) Well, I appreciate it. (Both still laughing…) Now, when you think back a little bit back in time when this… in our early interview we talked about when the idea of having continuous progress and multi-age, and it was decided, it seemed like, that XXXXXXX was a school that was going to run with that idea. How would it have felt different? How important do you feel it was that your school… the XXXXXXX, the special area teachers… art, music, and P.E…. how do you feel… how important do you feel it was the XXXXXXX were willing to accept multi-age groups into their classrooms?

**Ms. X:** Well, from a union point of view, the teachers need their breaks, and for us to have the buy-in, we needed to be included. And there are some schools where they’re not… the special area teachers are not included in the decision. They’re not included in the planning. They’re not included in the scheduling. They’re left out of everything. And that’s part of the training that I do too is empowering the teachers themselves and empowering the special-area teachers. The XXXXXXX training is for music, art, and P.E.
Me: Right.

Ms. X: We work together, and it makes us stronger. If we’re connected in with the curriculum, it makes us stronger, and we can have a stronger leg to stand on. What was your question again? I kind of took a right turn.

Me: Well… How important do you feel it was that the XXXXXXX… the special area teachers were willing to…

Ms. X: Well, I think all of us have worked on a team where there’s one or two people who can tend to be stubborn and not open to situations, and our school started that way with a couple of people, and over time they’ve gone their own way. But I think it’s critical. You’ve got to have buy-in. You’ve got to have buy-in, and you’ve got to have the research, and you’ve got to have the leadership, and you’ve got to have the support to make these changes and to grow into a new sort of… What’s the word for it?… Not the way we’re assembled, but the way we’re structured in our school. And without all of the times they spent with us in inclusion, and then when we started with multi-age… I think it would’ve fallen, and we would’ve had parents not happy. We had to spend a lot of time with the shareholders as well, the children and the families to get them to buy into it…

Me: Sure.

Ms. X: And when the school was… the first couple of years we let parents know we’re going to be a little different than the other schools, because you’ve got to have a parent buy-in too; otherwise, you’re fighting not only the administration but the teachers, the parents, the kids… it’s just a mess. So again, I’m going to brag on our county, that our county uses foresight…used foresight, the research and the knowledge to make sure that everybody’s on the same path as much as possible. A lot of it again is our leadership in our school.

Me: I’m wondering, though, how it would’ve been different…. Because I’ve come across this when I was locating the multi-age schools… I was wondering how it might have been different if XXXXXXX XXXX had decided that they were going to have multi-age groups and continuous progress groups, and then, you know… We were just talking about choice and buy-in… How would it have been different if they started the multi-age model, but then the XXXXXXX, art, music, and P.E. said, “No, we’re not going to be a part of it.” How do you think it would’ve been different if that had been the case?

Ms. X: There was actually a year that we said we’d rather have the kids graded for this year until we get our feet wet and we… you know, we get a handle on it, and there are some schools that do that. They let the specialist have a little more control in what they do… but again, that’s going against the philosophy. So, it depends on the flexibility of the administration. I think that it would’ve been more difficult if we weren’t all on the same page, (indecipherable)… in-fighting… (indecipherable)… I just want kindergarten…(indecipherable)… and that causes conflict between the classroom teachers and us as well.

Me: Uh-huh.

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Ms. X: Because we’re kind of going in the opposite direction of the direction they’re moving. And we’re classroom teachers too, and we need to be together on it (inaudible). And I think if you don’t have that cohesiveness, that cooperation between all the people in the school… that’s when you get problems, and I think that’s one of the wonderful elements of our school… that we really work together, all of us, everyone working together. And that’s the sign of a successful school. We have an excellent reputation in our county too… and I think it’s because we started with this inclusion and then the multi-age thing to begin with.

Me: Uh-huh.

Ms. X: And we did… we had all that stuff figured out ahead of time, so nobody was really shocked when it all started happening.

Me: It sounds like it would’ve been different, in one sense, in-house… within XXXXXX XXXX… about the relationship between the teachers, and it would’ve been maybe been causing constant conflict between special area and classroom teachers. Would it have been different for the kids? Do you think it would’ve different for the students?

Ms X: Well, I think I touched on that once before. I think it’s wonderful… I think it’s wonderful for third and fourth-graders to see what they’re working toward. They’re building up to that level, and to be right there and be part of that activity, and there’s other things… you know, clay projects things that are a lot more complicated. Same thing, having them see where it’s all going and being a part of it in their own class when they come to art class or when they go to P.E. or when they go to music. They’re going to see how it’s going to be for them, and they can see what all they’re going to learn. They’re seeing it right there next to them. I just think it’s a real positive environment. Really. To me it’s not a negative.

Me: Do you think it would’ve felt different if the homeroom teachers were multi-age all day long and say… Do you think it would’ve felt different for the students to say, “And now just (emphasized) second graders are going to art.”

Ms X: I’m sure it would’ve felt different, but I don’t know. I haven’t really spent time thinking about it... I like to think about things before I answer a question.

Me: Sure.

Ms. X: Because I haven’t had that, so it could be useful if it was socialization thing… where we just wanted the second graders to have their identity for that one period a day or something, and I could see that happening. We do that a couple times during the school year where all the kindergartners are all together doing one big activity out in the field

Me: Uh-huh.

Ms. X: So we do have that opportunity still… I’m not really answering your question, because we haven’t really done that.
Me: Well, it’s hard to imagine a situation…

Ms. X: It’s hard to imagine.

Me: And that’s …

Ms. X: It’s hard. But there’s positive… You know, there’s positive and negatives to every situation. Again, it’s how you look at it, and if that’s the way they did it…. Kids are very flexible. They’re very resilient, and they can handle just about anything… you know, any type of grouping and every kind of situation if they have the knowledge and the background. Like that new boy, XXXXXXX, who came in, and he’s autistic and the vision and the albino-ism and all of that. Those kids… he just came to school, and those kids had no opportunity to learn what was going on with him, and that’s when you get into trouble. I mean, that’s just a small example of what can happen if the kids don’t know what’s up with him, and they’re going to make fun of him, they’re not going to be happy with it, he’s going to be a bother to them. But if they understand the problem or what he’s dealing with, they can be more compassionate, and a lot of our schools don’t have compassion. So because of that mind-set it’s much easier for the kids to be more flexible, be in mixed groupings, work with this group (indecipherable). I know I didn’t really answer your question.

Me: Okay. We’re talking an imaginary scenario that’s not coming from your experience.

Ms. X: Yeah.

Me: But I wanted to just throw that out there. But you also talked about pros and cons and things like that. What is the most rewarding or satisfying thing about teaching art to multi-age groups?

Ms. X: There are times and situations where I’m on this track and I’m teaching a particular idea, and maybe I’m not explaining it well enough, that some of the kids are missing it, and some of those kids who are missing it, whether they’re fourth or third grade, or whatever, they’ll bring it to my attention. Often times it is the younger kids… I teach pretty high level, and it’s a good grounding thing for me to make sure that I’m being clear so that everybody gets what I’m saying. And then there are times when you’ve got the older kids who say things, like… remember you saw in that one class today… and they’re just hilarious, and those third and fourth-graders would’ve missed out on that. I mean there were some precious moments in that class. Some pretty funny things…and so with the multi-age, there’s a lot that’s brought to the table and there’s a lot of different experiences and a lot of different personalities, and that just makes for a fuller, richer class, and in a way it’s a microcosm for our a whole global society, you know, because they’re going to have to be able to deal with people of different levels and different ages and different sizes and different everything. And it’s just a miniature version of the real world. So I don’t see what’s bad about that.

Me: And when I think about it, elementary schools or summer camps, that’s one of the few places where we hang out with… I mean, here you and I are, and we’re not the same age, and I’m learning from you, and vice versa.
Ms. X: And I’m learning from you too.

Me: Yeah, so…

Ms. X: Absolutely. And it’s the same in the classroom. And if we had them all… if I had them all day long, imagine what I could do, you know. (We both laugh) Forty minutes.

Me: Yeah.

Ms. X: Thirty-six times or less a year is not very much, so, you know, I don’t get to do nearly what I would want to do, because of the time constraints and also what I have to do. I have to do these things.

Me: And that actually might lead into the next question. If I’m going to ask you about the most rewarding things about multi-age instruction… What’s the most frustrating thing about teaching art to multi-age groups?

Ms. X: Sometimes I feel like I’m pushing the younger ones along too fast or expecting too much of them, and I get frustration. I had one boy shut down yesterday during class. He’s really babied at home, and he couldn’t… he… there was nothing threatening about the painting, and I just had them doing abstract lines and shapes on the table, and that was frustrating for me to see him getting frustrated over something that simple. But I had to keep him moving along for those kids who are little further along socially as well as developmentally, and that’s frustrating to me, and sometimes it’s frustrating for the kids that I might be moving just a little too fast in those mixed-age younger classes. I have to be careful on that. I don’t find that (inaudible). I do get frustrated sometimes near the end of the year with the fifth graders and just their whole behavior change… they make a major shift before they are about to go to middle school. And there’s some behaviors and some things that come out that I… upsets me because I don’t like the third and fourth graders to say, “Oh, that’s cool, man, I’m going to act just like that.” (I laugh)... and they’re learning tricks early. So, socially, there’s some downside to the whole thing a little bit because you’ve got… but you would have that in a regular first-grade class. You’re going to have kids who are less socially developed, you know, so it’s really just a little bit broader, but not that much so. But the difference between (inaudible) So that’s frustrating. And then I guess sometimes for planning, when I know I want to do this subject, and I don’t want it to be repetitive for the older kids. You know I have to be careful about the topic that I choose, and I have to be mindful of the three year cycle… because I don’t want the kids [to say], “Oh, we did that last year, and we have to do that again.” I don’t want to repeat things on them, and sometimes that happens, and it happens every year. One or two classes will get something we’ve done before because those kids… some the kids moved up and some of them didn’t… they’re back with the kindergartners again, and they’re getting some of those (inaudible) again, maybe just a little different twist. But we try to make it… (inaudible). So those are the frustrations with it. It’s just the repetition, and the mix of kids sometimes gets in the way of what you’re trying to accomplish.

Me: And with the fifth graders…

Ms. X: Fifth-graders, the whole…
Me: …trickles down a little bit at the end of the year.

Ms. X: Yeah, it trickles down at the end of the year, exactly.

Me: What does it mean to you to be able to connect your curricula with the themes studied in the multi-age classroom? Does that mean something to you?

Ms. X: I think it empowers me, and anybody who doesn’t see it that way; I think they’re not looking at the whole thing. It makes what I’m doing that much more powerful, because I’m adding… I’m contributing. They are bringing things here that we can expand upon. I’m working on that side of the brain that’s right brain… that’s problem solving, and it’s not just facts. “Just the facts, Max.” It’s taking what they’re learning in the classroom and sending it up a whole other level, and to be personally expressive, and to be knowledgeable about the subject and knowledgeable about what you’re doing. It’s just a beautiful thing! And it’s something that I can make happen here that doesn’t happen other places. So, the multi-age thing is just bringing that many more opinions, thoughts … you know, where they’re at together at one time, and I think it’s a beautiful thing. I like it! I like it. (chuckles)

Me: You said it’s empowering and it’s a beautiful thing. (She laughs) That’s powerful!

Ms. X: Well, it is!

Me: We were just saying, you know, how you felt that connecting to the themes was empowering and beautiful, were some of the words you used, and it was actually bringing me to the last scheduled question, because that involves interaction with other people in your school… to plan this… and for the county to plan this as well. So along the way we’ve talked a lot about teams of teachers, and we’ve talked a lot about teams of students and pods and small groups and teams of students.

So, from your point of view, though, do you feel like a part of this team, and if so, at what level do you feel like…

Ms. X: Of the XXXXXXX (the special area teachers) or of the whole school?

Me: Either or. What part do you feel connected to any team on any level at XXXXXXX XXXX?

Ms. X: Well, obviously, I’m connected to my team, the XXXXXXX, because we have to work together because we have similar scheduling issues, and we bring something to the school kind of in common, but… looking at our team probably… XXXXX and I are very close, and we feel closest to the music department because our curriculums are little more compatible than the P.E. P. E. tends to alienate… you know, keep to themselves… “Oh, we’re just doing P.E. stuff… da, da, da.”… And fortunately, they’re open enough to integrate at times, but it’s kind of a struggle. We’ve got some old guard down there… so it’s been kind of a struggle. I’ve had to have some leadership in there… I’ve had to pass some leadership on to some other people and its been really interesting to see how things work… or don’t work (short laugh). So, I’ve kind of had to be the benefactor as far as leadership on the team and say, “Well, maybe let’s try this if you’re not
getting along with that person.” There’s been… it’s just like a family… there’s things that go on.

Me: Sure.

Ms. X: Each of us, though, however, have been assigned to a team in the school… a classroom team.

Me: Uh-huh.

Ms. X: And we got to choose our teams. You know, I chose my team, and I usually go to that same team every year, because, one, a lady on there… I used to… she’s my neighbor, and I’ve lived across from her for 17 years, and she’s an awesome teacher. Another reason was because my student… my son actually was in her class for a couple of years, so I feel connected with them for multiple reasons.

Me: Which team is this?

Ms. X: This is XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX. They have the hearing impaired unit. They’re the older group.

Me: We saw them today… they had the interpreter…

Ms. X: Right. I feel connected to them. I respect them. They’re awesome teachers, and the way we deal with kids is very similar… and they’re intermediate… I personally prefer intermediate students; they challenge me more cerebrally (chuckles) instead of just maintenance and managing. But each of us got to pick which team we wanted to work with and some people like P. E. [said], “Well I’ll just pick them. They’re closest to me.”

Me: Uh-huh.

Ms. X: They don’t have that same kind of… some of them don’t have…

Me: For you, it seemed like a real conscious decision…

Ms. X: To me it was a conscious decision. It wasn’t just, you know, random, and that’s how some people are. They just… you know, whatever’s easiest. I prefer to work with people that I enjoy working with, so…

Me: Sure.

Ms. X: And their kids too. I get some of the best projects from that team. I don’t know why. It just …. They click… (inaudible) So there is some bonding that way, and of course, what’s wonderful about being special-area teacher you get to know everybody in the school, and most teachers… primary, and they don’t know who the intermediate teachers are, and they’re lucky if they even know the teams’ names. So, we have an automatic advantage.
Me: So you feel connected to all the multi-age teams?

Ms. X: I feel connected to all the teams... all the teams and all the teachers because I’ve been here so long. Even the new teachers... I make a point of introducing myself and letting them know I have resources, and I’ll be glad to help them and give them whatever they might need... and make a point of contacting them. But I try to make myself and the art department an integral part of the school. That’s part of the public relations that a lot of people don’t take the time. They just do their own thing and don’t really worry about the impact it has and the connectedness it has, and the power that it has so. It’s all where you come from.

Me: Do you feel like XXXXXX XXXX Elementary feels like a team?

Ms. X: Yeah, I think we do. For the most part. I’ve been in quite a few schools where it gets very cliquey, and some people don’t want to talk to other people that are below them, or whatever. I don’t know (inaudible). There are definite teams, and schools around that are very much like that, and you can ask XXXXX; she’s been at... this is her third year she’s been at one school for two years and another one for another year, and this one, and she much prefers this one. She says at one school, they’re so “old school” over there that they don’t want to try anything new, and the other one they’re so cliquey that the principal won’t even hire her, and every school has their own culture. So I really do think we have a unique situation here. There’s not the in fighting that you get at some schools and not the competition that you get at some schools. We’re very supportive of everybody here and those accomplishments that we are able to do, and we feel like we help kids together. We’re all embedded in learning.

Me: I’ve definitely have had that feeling during my visits here, so. Thank you for reflecting upon our interviews and our time together and also about your years here at XXXXXX XXXX. I really appreciate it.

Ms. X: You’re welcome.

Me: And I really learned a lot.

Ms. X: I learned a bit too. You made me think.

Me: Thank you so much.

Ms. X: Thank you.
APPENDIX L

Sample Tabulation Sheets for Close Ended Survey Questions

5. Have you taught multi-age classes in the past?
   □ Yes   □ No

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Retrieval Information)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Retrieval Information)

| 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 |

If you answered yes, please check your years of multi-age teaching experience in the subject area of art.
   □ 1-3 years   □ 4-6 years   □ 7-9 years   □ 10 years or more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Multi-age Experience</th>
<th>Frequency (Tally)</th>
<th>Retrieval Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 3 Years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 6 Years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 9 Years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years or more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Where do you teach art?
   - Your own classroom
   - A portable unit
   - You travel from homeroom to homeroom to teach art
   - Other, please describe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Frequency (Tally)</th>
<th>Retrieval Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your Own Classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Portable Unit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel from Homeroom to Homeroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

Many art teachers chart more than once here, due to the fact that many of them teach at more than one school. Therefore the same art teacher may teach in a classroom in one school, and from a cart at another.
9. What is the approximate number of students in your multi-age art classes?

- Less than 15
- 15-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36 or more students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Frequency (Tally)</th>
<th>Retrieval Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(25, 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 20</td>
<td>#H  11</td>
<td>(3, 15, 25, 7, 7, 7, 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 25</td>
<td>#H #H #H #H #H  1</td>
<td>(3, 1, 15, 25, 7, 7, 7, 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30</td>
<td>#H #H #H #H #H #H 1</td>
<td>(3, 15, 25, 7, 7, 7, 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 35</td>
<td>#H #H #H #H #H #H #H 1</td>
<td>(3, 15, 25, 7, 7, 7, 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 or More</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Team taught...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

* Please Note that N > 36 here...

Many multi-age art teachers responded more than once either to show differences between their primary and intermediate multi-age houses... or to show the differences between the two schools that they work at... or to differentiate with ESE... or to show differences between size of team taught classes vs. single homeroom teacher...
APPENDIX M

Sample Revised Tabulation Sheets for Open Ended Survey Questions

If you answered yes, please describe your opinion or stance on tying your art curriculum in with the themes being used in the multi-age homerooms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded Response</th>
<th>Frequency (Tally)</th>
<th>Retrieval Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally in favor of thematic integration, and makes interdisciplinary connections when possible</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt s to integrate themes when appropriate, but is generally ambivalent as to whether this is a good or bad policy.</td>
<td>H H H H H H H H H H</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefers not to integrate classroom theme into the art curricula. These teachers may occasionally make thematic connections in the art room, but overall their stance on doing so seems negative.</td>
<td>H H H</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Statements for Generally Favorable:

1. "Love it! Students bring knowledge with them to art and, hopefully, back to the classroom."

Sample Statements for Generally Ambivalent:

- "It is okay, can be a plus as long as my instructional focus is the "meat" of being an artist."
- "Sometimes the themes tie into lessons we can do in the art room—sometimes it doesn't. Ex: why do people work? - In Art, I tied this theme into a lesson on careers in art."

Sample Statements for Generally Negative Since:

- "I think it is totally ridiculous. It would be just as appropriate to ask basic education teachers to gear their math instruction to what I'm teaching in Art."
14. Please describe any disadvantages you perceive to teaching art to multi-age classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded Response</th>
<th>Frequency (Tally)</th>
<th>Retrieval Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Levels in Art Are Too Great in Multi-age Classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A) Harder for Younger Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Harder for Older Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-age Models Don’t Match Well With Grade Level Expectations in Art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible Grouping Creates Inconsistent Art Rosters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates Extra Work for the Art Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability Groups in Subject Area Don’t Match Ability Levels in Art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes Difficulty in Instructing Students with Developmental Differences in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, but Acknowledges that these Differences Occur in Traditional Graded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms as well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Kindergarten Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Grade Level Combinations are too great in art, 2 grade levels are more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Disadvantages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Well, the constant moving of homeroom students messes up our classes. Students could be moved every 9 weeks if need be. Also if they are moved around sometimes they miss out or repeat the same lesson if they switch to another teacher in the same area."
### Codes for Those Who, Overall, Oppose Multi-age Art Instruction at the Elementary Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded Response</th>
<th>Frequency (Tally)</th>
<th>Retrieval Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to reach differing developmental levels</td>
<td>□□□□</td>
<td>(15, 32, 9, 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevents students from reaching potential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test results favor graded instruction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to do fair Assessment of Student work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires Extra time in planning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looping of Students doesn't allow Teacher to repeat lessons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible regrouping of Students can cause art rosters to shift in mid project</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX N

Sample of Coded Interview Transcript

Me:  Right. These are little more specific. They are K, 1, and 2, but there is a lot of overlapping too. Obviously something you might introduce a very simple printing technique in kindergarten, you would do a higher level by the time you're in second grade, so.

Our district has just moved, oh, let's see, we have two curbs on a street, it's like the education goes from one curb back to the other curb, back to the other curb as far as what we're doing and we're back towards doing theme planning. We kind of moved away from that for a while and then now that we're back to the Title theme, something we used to do a long time ago. And what they're encouraging special areas to do is to integrate...(cell phone interruption)

Me:  We were still talking about your curricula in which you teach here and the last thought that we left off, we had a brief interruption, was how the district was encouraging to use theme's again and to integrate, we're getting into that topic.

Right. Several years ago we had a lot of training and I was part of that training. How to make the teachers more effective, how to help them understand how to teach multi-age, get an understanding of continuous progress. Because often times the classroom teachers learn all the new vocabulary and everything and we're left kind of out in the wind until somebody says, "Hey, what about us?" So I was one of those windy people and said, "Well how are we going to internalize this? How does this become something real for us?" And I think that the classroom teachers and the P.E. teachers were brought in and we helped develop some training to lead the teachers... special area teachers in the right way, still leaving them some flexibility to do their thing but understanding where the standards came from, what our county initiatives were as well as site-based things and try to make it make sense of it all to the special area teachers... especially vocabulary and terminology. Most people had no idea what continuous progress was, so for many of these people, they learned it by coming to our training before their schools even did it, which fortunately, who's our supervisor and a few of us really like being on top of things and knowing what's coming and being there ahead (chuckle) and knowing the first and sharing it with the art teachers, I think that helps the art teachers be stronger advocates with music and P.E. also. And to be more on the same level with the classroom teachers because we are classroom teachers too and that we should be up on all that and the new techniques and strategies and everything that comes and so, I'm always beating at their doors saying, "What about us, what about us?" So the thing was Theme Integration, that's the latest thing that we're really working with the teachers. We have gone from having a different group of themes over a year to having a three-year plan. This is a major shift and they have been saying it's been coming and every year they say, "Oh well, maybe another year." But now what's going to happen next? First and second, sometime during those three years they're going to have a theme. The whole pod will teach a theme at the same time so sometime during their primary first or second year they will learn about geology and the earth (unintelligible) which was a couple of years ago and because it is going to be repeated every three years, they can redo those lessons again in three years... so that's the initiation of the curriculum building and I'm going pull in where art goes into that.

Me:  Is this school-wide?
This is school-wide. And it’s actually, it’s gone from school-wide to now county-wide.

Me: Oh, really?

So in our whole county, sometime during that particular year, everybody in the county is teaching, in elementary, the same theme, quote theme. It may not be exactly the same semester. It may not be first, second or third in the semester, but at sometime in that year because of the resource problems. There’s not that many resources where everybody can do it at the same exact time, so logistically that’s kind of why it’s had that flexibility. We anticipate over the next three years that enough resources will be there, that everybody can be doing “healthy eating” at the same time or Florida, what makes Florida unique at the same time. On a site-based level, we special areas are trying to do at least one integration with the classroom subjects at least once each quarter. That’s kind of the goal, that’s the goal and which I think is reasonable. Sometimes it’s harder to integrate because of just the subject, it just doesn’t.

Me: Depends on the theme?

Yes, depends on the theme. It just doesn’t work that well so then in that case I tend to do more integration in the themes that do blend together better and that’s what I try to share with other teachers and the training and you can’t do everything they’re doing all the time. We have our own, and this really important, we have our own curriculum that we are supposed to accomplish. We have our own benchmarks we’re supposed to meet and if we’re smart, we can figure out ways to do it both at the same time. But you need the time to plan. It’s important to meet with other people in our areas, other art teachers, because we’re our best resources and the same with music and P.E. So we’re in year two of that three-year cycle so we’re still developing new things, new ways to integrate new topics and new subjects... just everything that’s new for a lot of us, including classroom teachers. They’ve restructured a little bit that’s based upon an essential question. There is a vocabulary that goes along with it for each theme or unit, whatever you want to call it and guiding questions that follow and this will be repeated every three years... the same thing... And in fact... primary to intermediate actually had the same question at the same time so in kindergarten they’re going to be learning a lower level of what makes organisms go together or work well together or whatever, I don’t know. I’m just making up a topic, but in the intermediate it’s at a higher level but sometimes during those three years, they’re in primary or those three years in intermediate their getting it. Do you understand?

Me: Sure... Absolutely and the three years matches up well with whether you’re in a primary or intermediate house.

Right... so, I may teach Egypt in kindergarden but I can teach it again in fourth grade and do totally different things but it could still be the same topic.

Me: Right.

Okay. What I tend to do with big projects like that is do it once every seven, six, five years or six years and they get it sometime during that time because there’s just not enough time...
to get it all in. They might get, per se, Egypt after first grade then that’s all they’ll get. If they’re in fifth grade they’re going to get a higher level of the whole Egypt experience and that’s just the luck of the draw. Do you know what I’m saying?

Me: Yes, I was going to... I was thinking about all the pieces of this puzzle with Sunshine State Standards and then you know, benchmarks, thematic integration, so you have a lot of outside things that influence the curricula. Considering all these outside influences do you still think your curricula here, at [redacted], do you still feel it’s teacher driven... do you still have a lot of choice and options?

[redacted]: Right. Absolutely. Yeah, I do. Some people are very offended by being told what to do but that’s because they’re stuck in their ways or they just don’t want to change and there are a lot of people out there, classroom teachers too, they just don’t want to do it. So I think it’s important to have openness. I like to develop my own lessons and for me, it’s much more exciting to do new things. Even in a three-year cycle there might be a couple of things that I’ll repeat, but I’m going to come up with new things too because I just don’t want to do the same thing all the time. Classroom teachers who just take to kindergarten or fifth grade, they have their favorite, they teach the same thing every year. They’ve already got it figured out... and that’s just not what I’m about and art changes every time, directions change kind of off in a loop.

Me: So within that, it sounds like you’re saying, within those outside influences that you still have a lot of choice in what you want to do.

[redacted]: Yes, I do. We have district-adopted textbooks which are very good. They’re SRA and they are very, very user-friendly. Kind of expensive to get classroom sets of them so a lot of schools don’t have them. At least they should get the teacher addition for guidance especially for the younger teachers who really, we have a lot of teachers now who are coming in to teach art. They don’t even have education at all. Those are our alternative certification people and it really helps them to have something to hold onto, some handles, you know and having that free form curriculum out there that they know covers everything is very useful to them.

Me: And from your point of view, being more experienced, do you follow that textbook or do you use it as a resource?

[redacted]: I don’t— I use it as a resource so I really do. I like to make my own lessons. I like to come up with my own ideas and I’m always welcome for other influences and other opinions and thoughts and stuff, but it’s just fun for me. And with the whole integration theme, I am forced, almost to develop new things that go along with the beats of students, so for me it’s kind of fun. That’s my attitude about it, though.

Me: Yeah, I can tell.

[redacted]: I do things that I wouldn’t have normally done because...

Me: Well it seems like you’re having a lot fun when I watch you teach and we’ve talked a lot about your curriculum but now lets talk about the place where you deliver the instruction and
APPENDIX O

Sample of Coded Field Notes

Students: “YEAH XXXXX!” This is another instance where the class atmosphere is supportive rather than competitive. They are happy to celebrate XXXXX’s success. Overall the social relationships in the class are fantastic. They are social, friendly, teasing (but not in an inappropriate way). They are not so much collaborative as they are supportive.

Brief example of the supportive nature of these students: Several girls are sitting together at the same table working on their kite projects. Two of the girls have decided that the images on their kites should show their love of shopping.

Girl #1: “Oh, I’m going to put an Abercrombie label on mine!”
Girl #2: “I’ll do Louis Betton!”
Girl #3 (YYYY): “That’s a great idea!”

Not only are the girls planning together and bouncing ideas off each other, but also they don’t mind sharing those ideas. Then a third party comes along with some unsolicited positive feedback.

Although I have pointed out many positive aspects of the community spirit in these multi-age classrooms, that’s not to say that there aren’t any discipline problems. Clearly misbehavior and teasing still occur. Right now two girls seem to be gently teasing a tall redheaded boy with a high pitched voice. The teasing, though, seems in good nature and the boy plays along with it.

PLANNING & LUNCH & ANOTHER PLANNING PERIOD ARE NEXT

Because this is my last visit to XXXXXX XXXX Elementary, we use nearly every planning period to wrap up loose ends from the first two interviews and also to conduct the third interview.

Conversation during lunch is mainly social today. The XXXXX is frustrated by

and XXXXX tell her this in a way that is not so much critical as it shows their concern for the XXXXX. They really seem to care for their co-worker.

After the second planning period and more interviewing, the next class to come to Ms. XXXXX’s art room is Ms. XXXXXXXX’s portion of the XXXXXXX pod, which is a K-2 multi-age class.

The students are on the carpet again and Ms. XXXXX begins class by reading a picture book by Jamie Lee Curtis. The book is on the subjects of feelings and emotions and it is
called “Today I Feel Silly”. Because the book is about feelings and emotions, I wonder if this is a new lead-in to her “Art Museum” activity.

The story introduces a lot of different feelings (confused, angry, etc) and Ms. XXXXX stops frequently to ask a lot of questions.

**Ms. X:** “Can you show me an angry face?” “What does confused mean?”

**Student:** “Sometimes when you make a mistake…”

The story progresses and introduces even more emotions such as “excited” and “cranky”. The kids are really engaged. They point out rhyming words within the story and they laugh at all the appropriate cues: “I have a crush on my teacher.” “I have diarrhea.” The students also point out the emotions displayed in illustrations: **Student:** “Look, even the cat has a sad face.”

Having used the Jamie Lee Curtis book as an introduction to the concept of emotions, Ms XXXXX turns the class’ attention to the Museum Activity. Once again she gives the students a chance to get up and look at all the prints up close. I guess I should have thought of this sooner, but Ms. XXXXX is not teaching exactly the same lesson to each primary multi-age class and each intermediate multi-age class. She has made some fine distinctions in their developmental levels and adjusts the lesson accordingly. In this case, Ms. XXXXX has made the minor adjustment of adding the Jamie Lee Curtis story as an introduction. Presumably, she feels that these students will benefit from having a general introduction to the concept of emotions before exploring the feelings within the art prints. I have also seen how Ms. XXXXX will adjust the length of the “Museum Activity” and, more specifically, whether or not the students are required to write their answers down on paper or reply verbally. In a later conversation with Ms. XXXXX, she confirms my suspicion. She makes adjustments in her lessons to meet the developmental levels of her students.

As the students walk around the room:

**Student (XXXXX):** “Ooooo! That’s George Washington.”

**Ms. X:** “Yes, XXXXX. How did you know that?”

The students return to their seats and it’s time for some general questions:

**Ms. X:** “What do all these pictures have in common?”

**Student responses include:** “George Washington!” “People!” “Numbers!”

During this conversation, Ms. XXXXX also guides them to the realization that each print also displays an emotion, just like the examples in the Jamie Lee Curtis book. She then asks the students to name the emotions that they found in the examples posted around the room. The art production assignment for the day is to have the students draw a picture that shows an emotion that they have seen from the art historical examples. Just to reemphasize my marginal remark above, Ms. XXXXX really has scaled down the assignment to the developmental level of this class. Not only did she begin the lesson with the Jamie Lee Curtis book, but she also kept the museum discussion to a minimum.
and left some additional time for art production. Many developmental adaptations are evident in this case.

While the students are working on their drawings, I look around the class. There are about 24 or so students in the class. There is some cultural diversity within the class with about 9 students appearing to be African Americans and 3 students who are possibly Hispanic.

Clean up time is upon us already and Ms. XXXX collects their artwork before they line up at the door. As the students are waiting by the door, Ms. XXXX uses a “Simon Says” management technique as a tool to keep the students orderly as they wait on Ms. XXXXXXXX to pick them up.

Ms. X: “Simon says to point to the ceiling. Simon says to put your hands to your lips.”
And then...
Ms. X: “Raise your hand if your picture showed happiness. Raise your hand if your picture showed somebody that was shocked or surprised.”

Another planning period allows Ms. XXXXX and I to put the finishing touches on all of taped interviews. We wrap up a lot of loose ends and then it’s time for the last class of the day, which is Ms. XXXXXXXX’s pod of XXXXXXX XXXXXXX, a K-2 multi-age class.

The students are on the carpeted area and Ms. XXXX explains that some students will be working on their warm and cool color paintings while others will be working on their kites. With that in mind, Ms. XXXXX pulls a few examples of the kite project from the students’ folders. She uses them as reminders and examples.

Ms. X: “What do you think XXXXXXXXXX is trying to communicate through her kite?”

Students Responses Include: “She likes mountains.” “She likes animals.” “She likes Tennessee!” (The word, “Tennessee” is printed on her kite above the image of mountains.)

Ms. X: “Is that the kite you were trying to convey?”

Student (XXXXXXXX): “Yes!” She relates a quick story about her trip to Tennessee with her dad.

Moments later...,
Ms. X: “The third project we can be finishing up relates to the Op Art Projects that we started.” Unless Ms. XXXXX’s Friday schedule has just become drastically staggered, there are some clear and obvious differences between the lesson she is teaching on primary pastel, the lesson she taught to Ms. XXXXXXX’s primary pod. Ms. XXXXXXX’s pod was not even involved in making the Op Art projects. And their lesson began with the Jamie Lee Curtis book. Clearly she does have more than just two sets of lesson plans per week.

*******************************************************************************
**Student:** “Oh yeah!” (In favor of the Op-Art project)
**Ms. X:** “Yes, this one can get tricky because it plays tricks on your eyes.”

The artwork is passed out and the students scurry to their seats and get to work. The class is active, interactive, and very friendly with one another. The students primarily work independently but are very spirited and friendly with one another.

Ms XXXXX circulates around the room and makes a point to show the class a few student kite projects that have also used warm and cool color schemes within their design. Ms. XXXX effectively shows the students connections between two independent projects that seemingly were unrelated. She is showing the class how learning from one project can transfer over to another project, whether it was intentional or not.

The day is over at XXXXXXX XXXX Elementary and I participate in one last dismissal with Ms. XXXXX and her biker riders and walkers in the XXXX community.

Before I go and say my goodbyes, I ask Ms XXXXX if she can show me what some of the multi-age homeroom pods look like. I’m not surprised to see that they resemble the multi-age pods I observed in XXXXXXXX a few years ago. A series of classrooms are all connected to larger central meeting area in the middle. This space can be used for larger whole group activities, pullout groups for individualized instruction, or for large family meetings. I ask her about the organization of the pods themselves. I want to know how the make up of the pods (teachers’ names and grade level combinations) are disseminated to the special area teachers. She explains that the administrators’ assistants and secretaries compile that information and provide it to the special area teachers during pre-planning. She makes it sound completely routine and almost unnecessary. When you have been at the same school for some time, and have been teaching multi-age for some time, these things must begin to seem routine. I suspect however that this sort of organizational tactic may be overlooked at a school that is only partially multi-age or is just beginning multi-age configurations. Unfortunately, specialists are often the last considered, particularly in moments of reform.

During our conversation I look on the wall of the multi-age pod. I notice some illustrated shields on display. These shields are on a smaller scale than the shields I saw at the art show. I ask Ms. XXXXX if the students made these shields in her art class too. Each shield has a written story on display next to it. Ms. XXXXX says that the students created these shields in their multi-age homerooms after they made the larger shields in her art room. Sometimes the multi-age homeroom teachers also connect to the concepts being studied in the art class. The shield concept was extended and even expanded to include a writing activity.
## Code Category: “ADV” for Advantages of Multi-age Art Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brief reminder of incident/evidence</th>
<th>Retrieval Source</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Less lesson planning per school year</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Advantage for teacher)</td>
<td>Interview 2: pages 17-18&lt;br&gt;Interview 2: page 22&lt;br&gt;Interview 3: page 1&lt;br&gt;Fieldnotes: page 12&lt;br&gt;Fieldnotes: page 23&lt;br&gt;Survey Question 13: respondent #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thematic interdisciplinary approach has advantages:</strong> “deeper, richer”, “more valuable”, “empowering”, “beautiful thing”, “I like it”&lt;br&gt;- generally favors thematic instruction</td>
<td>Interview 2: page 22&lt;br&gt;Interview 3: page 1&lt;br&gt;Interview 3: page 9&lt;br&gt;Survey Question 12B: respondents #1, 2, 3, 6, 17, 20, 21, 23, 27, 29, 31, 32&lt;br&gt;Survey Question 17B: respondent #15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contributes to Classroom Diversity</strong>&lt;br&gt;“broadening our learning opportunities”&lt;br&gt;“fuller, richer class” (representing global society)</td>
<td>Interview 2: page 24&lt;br&gt;Interview 3: pages 6 – 7&lt;br&gt;Survey Question 17B: respondents #5, 14, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Long Term Goals</strong>&lt;br&gt;“not pressured to cram it in in a year”</td>
<td>Interview 3: page 1&lt;br&gt;Survey Question 15: respondent #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peering/ Scaffolding</strong>&lt;br&gt;Pear assistance, tutoring, suggestions, cooperative groups, etc.</td>
<td>Fieldnotes: page 41&lt;br&gt;Survey Question 13: respondent #1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior/Classroom Management</strong>&lt;br&gt;Multi-age peering aided “time on task” when student finished early</td>
<td>Fieldnotes: page 41&lt;br&gt;Survey Question 13: respondent #2, 5, 13, 21, 24</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advantage of Developmental Grouping</strong></td>
<td>Survey Question 13: respondent # 12, 20, 33, 35</td>
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<td><strong>Students’ Cooperative and Positive Attitude</strong></td>
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### Code Category: “DIS” for Disadvantages of Multi-age Art Instruction

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<td><strong>Initial Difficulty</strong></td>
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| In reorganizing lessons by developmental groups rather than specific ages/grades | Interview 1: page 25  
Interview 2: page 14  
Interview 2: page 22  
Interview 3: page 1  
Interview 3: page 2 |
| **Differences in Developmental Levels:** |                  |
| Sometimes feels like she is pushing the lessons too fast for young ones | Survey Question 14: respondents #1, 4, 5, 6, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35  
Interview 3: page 8  
Survey Question 17C: respondent #4, 10, 35  
Survey Question 19C: respondent #4, 10, 15, 32 |
| **Greater the grade span, the greater difficulty** |                  |
| 2 grade span is better than 3 | Interview 2: page 23  
Survey Question 14: respondents #16, 30, 35  
Survey Question 19: respondent #18, 34, 35 |
| **Influencing Behavior**            |                  |
| -5th grade, end-of-year influence: “randy, rowdy” | Interview 2: page 22  
Interview 3: page 8 |
| - Behavior regression               | Survey Question 14: respondent #35 |
| **Flexible Grouping**               |                  |
| Creates inconsistent art rosters (not a big deal in interviews/ bigger in crossbreak) | Interview 2: page 28  
Survey Question 14: respondent #12, 13  
Survey Question 19: respondent #33  
Crossbreak Table 10B |
| **Repeatability**                   |                  |
| Looping of multi-age students did not allow for repeatable lessons from year to year | Interview 3: page 8  
Survey Question 14: respondent #23  
Survey Question 19: respondent #23 |
| **Team Taught Class Can Get Very Large** |                  |
| Loop hole in class size amendment   | Interview 2: pages 13 -14  
Survey Question 9: respondent #26 |
| **Doesn’t Match Well with Grade Level Standards** |                  |
| Poor Match for Testing              | Survey Question 14: respondent #3  
Survey Question 19, respondent #16 |
| **Creates Extra Work for Art Teacher** |                  |
|                                    | Survey Question 14: respondent #7, 25  
Survey Question 19: respondent #23 |
| **Loss of Kindergarten Curriculum** |                  |
|                                    | Survey Question 14: respondent #2, 21, 30 |
| **Ability Groups in Subject Areas Don’t Match Ability Levels in Art** |                  |
|                                    | Survey Question 14: respondent #8, 33  
Survey Question 17: respondent #3 |
APPENDIX Q

Crossbreak Tables

Crossbreak Table: Degree of Nongradedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Nongradedness</th>
<th>Supports Multi-age</th>
<th>Opposes Multi-age</th>
<th>I Don't Know</th>
<th>Doesn't Matter</th>
<th>Doesn't Care</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Entirely Multi-age</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some Multi-age</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>4</td>
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Crossbreak Table: Years of Multi-age Teaching Experience

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<th>Years of Multi-age Experience</th>
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<th>Doesn’t Matter</th>
<th>I Don’t Care</th>
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<td>0 – 1 Year</td>
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<td>1 - 3 Years</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 – 6 Years</td>
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<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 – 9 Years</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Years or More</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Crossbreak Table: Total Years of Teaching Experience

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<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Supports Multi-age</th>
<th>Opposes Multi-age</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 – 5 Years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
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<td>6 – 10 Years</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 – 15 Years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 Or More</td>
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### Crossbreak Table: Assignment to Multi-age Art Instruction

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<th>Assignment To Multi-age</th>
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<th>Doesn’t Matter</th>
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<tr>
<td>Willingly Applied to Multi-age School Site</td>
<td>10 (52.6%)</td>
<td>4 (21%)</td>
<td>4 (21%)</td>
<td>1 (5.3%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment Was Unexpected</td>
<td>9 (52.9%)</td>
<td>5 (29.4%)</td>
<td>2 (11.8%)</td>
<td>1 (5.9%)</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
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### Crossbreak Table: Presence of Flexible Regrouping

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<th>Presence of Flexible Regrouping</th>
<th>Supports Multi-age</th>
<th>Opposes Multi-age</th>
<th>I Don’t Know</th>
<th>Doesn’t Matter</th>
<th>I Don’t Care</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team-Taught Art Rosters Regrouped</td>
<td>8 (44.44%)</td>
<td>5 (27.77%)</td>
<td>4 (22.22%)</td>
<td>1 (5.55%)</td>
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<td>Team-Taught Art Rosters Remain Consistent</td>
<td>10 (71.42%)</td>
<td>1 (7.14%)</td>
<td>2 (14.29%)</td>
<td>1 (7.14%)</td>
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<td>One Multi-age Home Room Teacher: Regrouping Not Necessary</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
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<td>Combined Tabulations For All Art Rosters That Stay Consistent</td>
<td>13 (68.42%)</td>
<td>3 (15.79%)</td>
<td>2 (10.53%)</td>
<td>1 (5.26%)</td>
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Crossbreak Table: Participation in Training Tabulated

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<th>Participation In Training</th>
<th>Supports Multi-age</th>
<th>Opposes Multi-age</th>
<th>I Don’t Know</th>
<th>Doesn’t Matter</th>
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<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.66%</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>66.66%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>42.11%</td>
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<td>21.05%</td>
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Crossbreak Table: Participation in Specific Training

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<th>Content of Workshop</th>
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jeff Broome, a native of West Virginia, began his studies in art education at Florida State University where he received his bachelor’s degree and professional teaching certificate in 1994. He worked for many years as a public school art teacher in the State of Florida and was recognized with a Teacher of the Year Award from his colleagues in 1999. While continuing his work in public school systems, Jeff pursued and received a master’s degree in art education from the University of South Florida. In 2003, he returned to Florida State University to begin work on his Ph. D., also in art education. During this second stint at Florida State University, Jeff worked as a teaching assistant for the Department of Art Education and taught several classes in teacher preparation for pre-service art education students. In 2005, his efforts in this capacity were recognized with an Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award from his alma mater.

Jeff has given presentations on multi-age art education at both state and national conferences and has presented on the subject of thematically integrated art projects at school district workshops. His current teaching and research interests include cross-cultural studies in art education, social foundations of art and education, classroom management, the use of thematic learning centers, and further explorations in multi-age art education. His own artwork has been sold commercially, received recognition, and has seen publication and juried exhibition. Jeff currently resides in Athens, Georgia, with his wife, Monica, and their daughter, Mackenzie. Jeff began his post-doctoral career as a temporary assistant professor at the University of Georgia in August of 2006. He would like to thank every single art and art education student who has every entered one of his classrooms and has enriched his life in the process.