

Fall 12-12-2017

THE EFFECT OF MULTIAGE GROUPING ON THE SELF-ESTEEM OF STUDENTS

Aaron Farrant
afarrant@thechristsschool.org

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/educleaddoc_etd



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Farrant, Aaron, "THE EFFECT OF MULTIAGE GROUPING ON THE SELF-ESTEEM OF STUDENTS" (2017). *Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership for Learning Dissertations*. 8.
http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/educleaddoc_etd/8

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Leadership at DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership for Learning Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

THE EFFECT OF MULTIAGE GROUPING ON THE SELF-ESTEEM OF STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

In

Educational Leadership for Learning

In

The Bagwell College of Education

Kennesaw State University

by

Aaron Farrant

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee: Dr. Jimenez (Chair), Dr. Clegorne, and Dr. Buckman for their time, energy, and feedback. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Jimenez. From the first time we meet in your office to discuss this topic, you have consistently shown support and enthusiasm for this research and believed in the value this research could have in the field of education. Thank you!

I would like to thank Dr. Chandler. When I first began to research multiage grouping, you encouraged me as a coach and as a professor to pursue this idea and strive to find ways to improve how we educate children.

I would also like to thank all of those who participated in this study and were willing to give of their time and share their experiences.

To my wife, Jennie, and my two boys, Eli and Austin, thank you for all your love and support as I tried to balance work, school, and being a loving and present husband and father. You three mean everything to me and accomplishments mean nothing without you. I love you guys so much!

Finally, I would like to thank God. You have directed us to love others and find ways to make their lives better. I pray this research and the other things I do in this life will accomplish Your will.

Abstract

Educators know children need to learn at a level that is appropriately challenging for them. If the material is too difficult, the children will often feel defeated and stop trying. If the material is too easy, the children will often lose interest and not achieve their potential. Educators also know children learn at different speeds and have different abilities, even children who are the same age. Despite knowing this, the traditional educational model is designed to group children based solely on age and the expectation is for the teacher to differentiate to meet the needs of each individual child in the classroom.

Some schools are adopting different grouping models and are grouping children based on ability or achievement rather than age. These grouping models need to be examined to learn if they provide a better alternative to grouping and allow for greater student success. One of the common objections to a multiage ability grouping model is the effect it will have on the children when they are grouped with children who are older or younger than themselves. This qualitative case study was designed to learn about the effect multiage ability grouping had on the self-esteem of nine children in an independent school designed for students with dyslexia.

The nine students and one of each of their parents were interviewed during the students' first year in a multiage ability grouped classroom. From the responses, eight themes were identified: students felt the work was easier, students volunteered more answers, students had a more positive attitude toward school and schoolwork, multiage grouping encouraged multiage relationships, multiage grouping normalized, the size of

the classes, ability grouping, and students showed an increase in confidence and self-esteem.

Keywords: Multiage grouping, self-esteem, ability grouping, grouping models, dyslexia, differentiation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Context of the Study	1
Theoretical Framework	1
Policy Underpinnings	6
Purpose	7
Rationale	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	16
Self-Esteem	16
Grouping.....	23
Ability Grouping	23
Multiage Grouping	26
Effect of Multiage Grouping on Self-Esteem	28
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	31
Primary Research Question	31
Research Approach.....	31
Research Design	33
Context	34
Participants	34
Data Gathering Methods	36
Instruments Used for Data Collection	37
Data Analysis	38

Ethical Considerations	39
Limitations	40
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	41
Participants	41
Data Collection and Analysis	42
Identified Themes	43
Indicators of Change in the Students' Self-Esteem	
Theme #1: Students Felt the Work was Easier	44
Theme #2: Students Volunteered More Answers	45
Theme #3: Students Had a More Positive Attitude Toward	
School and Schoolwork	46
Impact of Multiage Grouping	
Theme #4: Multiage Grouping Encouraged Multiage	
Relationships	48
Theme #5: Multiage Grouping Normalized	50
Identified Factors	
Theme #6: Size of the Classes	54
Theme #7: Ability Grouping	56
Overall Change	
Theme #8: Students Showed an Increase in Confidence and	
Self-Esteem	57
Review of Emergent Themes	58
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND SUGGESTIONS	

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	65
Discussion of Findings	65
Limitations of Findings	69
Relationship of Findings to Other Literature	69
Conclusion	71
Suggestions for Future Research	72
References.....	73
Appendix A: Interview Protocol	84
Appendix B: Consent Form	89
Appendix C: Parental Consent Form with Child Assent Statement	91
Appendix D: IRB Approval	94

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Study

In this study, I interviewed nine children during their first year of being in a multiage ability grouped class. I asked the children questions about how their current classes are different than their previous classes. I asked them about the work they are doing to learn about their confidence levels. I asked them about their friends and what factors impact their friendships to learn about the social implication of multiage grouping. I also interviewed one parent of each child and asked the parents what changes they have seen in their child's confidence and self-esteem over the last year. I asked the parents what stories their children have told about their classmates and what effects they have seen from their children being in a multiage ability grouped class. Then I listened. I recorded their answers. I compared their answers and mined out the data I thought was relevant and helped answer the question: When students are grouped based on their current ability, what effect does being grouped with older or younger students have on a child's self-esteem? The results of these efforts are detailed in this study.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of this study is based on Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1988), Lee Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and his theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (Liem, Walker, & McInerney, 2011; Tudge & Scrimsher, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), as well as the importance of self-esteem, which was first clearly defined by psychologist William James in 1892 (Osborne, 2014).

Social Cognitive Theory focuses on how students learn from modeling those around them and the power of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988). Under this theory, students' learning is largely based on their environment and belief in their own ability to succeed (Bandura, 1988). With this being the case, it is important that research be done to understand the best possible grouping model a school can use to maximize student potential and how to increase a student's belief in his ability to achieve. When establishing grouping, it is important that students are grouped with peers who, from their perspectives, are similar to themselves (Bandura, 1988). These students need to see these similar peers solve problems to encourage their belief that they can also achieve (Bandura, 1988). Seeing other students who are able to complete similar tasks allows students to engage in the modeling process and develop self-efficacy, to believe they can be successful (Bandura, 1988).

Self-efficacy is a crucial concept in Bandura's theory. A people's belief in their ability to succeed is essential for their success. Bandura identified four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and psychological or affective states (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura (1977) suggested the most effective way to develop self-efficacy is through mastery experiences. When children experience personal success, they often begin to believe they can experience success again. When children fail, they often begin to believe they cannot succeed. A person's self-efficacy is largely determined by the sum total of these experiences. If children have repeated success, they will often develop a strong belief that they can be successful (Bandura, 1977). Even when they have moments of failure, there is a greater chance they will persevere through

challenges and failures because they have established a strong self-efficacy from past success. If they do preserve though challenges and failure, there is a strong likelihood they will develop an even stronger self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). If, however, children have repeated failures, they will most likely develop a low self-efficacy and believe they cannot be successful. Even in moments of success, they will often equate the success to external factors and have a strong resistance to believing they can sustain success (Bandura, 1977).

Another way an individual develops self-efficacy is through vicarious experiences. These vicarious experiences often occur from social models (Bandura, 1977). When children see other children who they see as similar to themselves achieve success, they often believe they can also be successful. Through observation and then personalization, children can identify with the person having success. If children believe they are similar to the person experiencing success, they may also come to believe they can experience the same success (Bandura, 1977). This belief can impact a person's self-efficacy.

A third way self-efficacy is developed is through social persuasion. If children are verbally told they can succeed, they are more likely to believe they have the ability to succeed and are more likely to put forth the effort to obtain success (Bandura, 1977, 1988). This method of developing self-efficacy must be tied to personal successes if the developed self-efficacy is to be sustained. Verbal persuasion will inevitably be compared to personal success and will strengthen or diminish the self-efficacy developed by social or verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1977, 1988).

It is important to note that it is easier for social persuasion to negatively affect self-efficacy than positively affect it (Bandura, 1977). When children are told they cannot succeed, they are more likely to not try their best or to quit before success can be achieved and thereby reinforce the social message that they cannot succeed. In this way, negative social persuasion is more likely to affect self-efficacy and personal success than positive social persuasion (Bandura, 1977).

The final factor that influences children's self-efficacy is their psychological or affective state and, more specifically, their personal interpretation of these states. If an individual experiences pain or fatigue during an activity, he is more likely to believe he cannot succeed at the activity (Bandura, 1977). Likewise, if an individual experiences stress during an activity, he is more likely to believe he cannot succeed at the activity (Bandura, 1977).

The fourth way to increase a child's self-efficacy is to reduce stress and to help train the child to interpret increased emotional states as a preparation of success rather than a reaction to one's inability to perform an activity successfully (Bandura, 1986, 1994).

Sociocultural Theory explains the importance of social interaction on the learning process. Students learn first from watching those around them. After they have observed others, they then begin to learn on the individual level (Liem, Walker, & McInerney, 2011). Under this theory, it is essential that students work with others who are different from themselves (Liem, Walker, & McInerney, 2011; Wertsch, 1991). It is within these interactions new strategies and knowledge are acquired. As children interact with those around them, they learn from them. This interaction helps them learn

and develop (Wertsch, 1991). A child that is grouped with those who are different in some way accelerates this learning and can accelerate the learning in them as well. There is an exchange that occurs between individuals which is beneficial to both (Wertsch, 1991). Often times this is illustrated as older to younger, or expert to novice, but it has also been noted that Vygotsky was interested in what the younger, less experienced person brought to the interaction (Tudge & Scrimsher, 2003).

Vygotsky also developed the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development. This theory demonstrates the power of students learning beyond the zone where they can independently solve problems and in the zone where they can solve problems under the guidance of someone else. Working with others in this zone is essential to learning and development (Leont'ev, 1981). Vygotsky explained that if this is not done instruction will always be behind the development of the child. It is essential that this is not the environment in which students are taught. As Vygotsky noted, "The only good learning is that which is in advance of development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). For a classroom to best accomplish this, the class should be at a similar ability level or have multiple learning environments which allow each individual or subgroup of students to work at that level (Vygotsky, 1978). The classroom must also provide the adult support to guide the student learning for each ability group (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1994).

Self-esteem was first clearly defined by psychologist William James in 1892. His definition was that self-esteem equals success divided by pretensions (Osborne, 2014). His understanding was that self-esteem was based on how well people perceived what they did based on their initial expectations. Over time, individuals develop an average self-feeling based on the sum total interaction of their expectations about their abilities

and perceived successes or failures (Osborne, 2014). Since failure can occur at any time and in areas the person might deem as unimportant, the total self-esteem of the individual is more impactful than an individual instance of perception of success or failure. The cumulative total of multiple events develops a people's self-concept, which influences the effort they put into something and the belief they can be successful (Osborne, 2014; Uffelman, 2011). This overall self-concept influences a people's belief about their ability to be successful in individual endeavors and relate to others (Uffelman, 2011). People's belief in their own abilities to succeed is tied to Bandura's theory about self-efficacy and the impact belief has on success and failure (Bandura, 1988).

Policy Underpinnings

This research is meant to be part of a comparison between the common practice of grouping students in grades based on their age and the practice of a school that groups students based on their achievement in certain subjects. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, as of 2014, there are thirty states that require a child to be five years old on or before September first to enroll in kindergarten that year. Eleven other states and the District of Colombia have a cutoff date between September first and October fifteenth. Connecticut still uses January first as its cutoff date, and the final eight states allow local schools flexibility to set their own required dates. Every state's primary method of grade placement for the children in their state is age-based rather than ability-based (Retrieved from:

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform/tab5_3.asp). This reinforces the

misconception that children who are the same age are developmentally equal and should be learning the same material.

There are some independent schools, however, that are using different models (Fink, 2016; Steenbergen-Hu, Makel & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016). These schools have policies that do not group children based on age but rather on their ability to perform and their current knowledge. Under this model, students of different ages are in the same classroom because it is ability and knowledge that have brought them together to learn, rather than age. Under normal public (and most independent) school policy, there are students of the same age grouped together with a variety of abilities and knowledge represented in the classroom. In a multiage grouping model, students with similar abilities and knowledge are grouped together, and there are a variety of ages represented in the classroom. This study is designed to investigate the impact going to a school with ability grouping has on self-esteem for students who first experienced schools grouped by age.

Purpose

This study will seek to discover the effect being grouped with different age students has on a child's self-esteem. The researcher will attempt to do this by interviewing the students and the parents of students who were formally in an age grouping model and are now in a multiage grouping model based on ability. The purpose of this study is to add to the research about multiage grouping as a viable, school wide grouping practice. Many factors would need to be considered before this grouping model should be implemented broadly. There exists some research about the academic impact of the ability grouping model (Fink, 2016; Steenbergen-Hu, Makel &

Olszewski-Kubilius, 2016). While promising, further research is warranted. Additional avenues of research could include investigating the value of a mixed model where multiage grouping is only used in math and language arts, as these are the primary subjects that build heavily on foundational knowledge and ability (Spooner & Browder, 2014). The current research will focus on the effect age grouping has on the self-esteem of students when they are grouped with other students who are older or younger than themselves. This research will be an important piece to add to the research surrounding the viability of this model. If this model shows a negative effect on self-esteem, it would impede considerations to implement this model in a school. In this case, either more research would need to be done, other research showing positive results about this model would need to be compared to this research to determine the overall effect on students, or a new model would need to be introduced. If the multiage grouping does not show a negative effect on a child's self-esteem, it removes a potential roadblock to this model being implemented and would defer to other research and benefits to determine if this model is worth pursuing. If this grouping model shows a positive effect, it would help push for more research to determine the other effects multiage grouping has on areas such as academic performance and motivation.

Rationale

Students differ in many areas, including academic ability, prior knowledge, and pace of learning. However, for convenience and ease of mass education, they have been grouped primarily by age, regardless of these differences. This has served those who are closest to the middle in prior knowledge and ability adequately, but has poorly served those whose knowledge, ability, or learning rate differs from their "average" age

peers. This has become more and more evident, and, in response, there has been a push for increased differentiation in classrooms (Fischer & Rose, 2001; Forsten, Grant & Hollas, 2002).

Differentiation occurs when a teacher no longer teaches a lesson one way, at one level, and expects all the students to adjust to the level that is taught. Nor are all the students expected to learn together with everyone else in the class and at the same pace as everyone else in the class. Instead, the teacher plans and creates a variety of ways that a student can learn (Marshall, 2016). Students may have accelerated curriculum or they may have additional support; some may work in teams, while others by themselves; others may have the opportunity to learn within their learning style preferences. The number one charge of differentiation is to “do whatever it takes to maximize students’ learning instead of relying on a one-size-fits-all, whole-class method of instruction.” (Wormeli, 2007, p. 9). Differentiation offers hope for all students to learn in their Zones of Proximal Development because they are no longer asked to conform to a classroom that is geared to educating one type of student, on one level, at one pace.

With the plethora of benefits differentiation offers to students, there has been an incredible push for teachers to differentiate in their classrooms and to provide this type of individualized instruction for the learners they teach. Despite all the benefits, however, differentiation still does not happen on a regular basis in many classrooms (Wormeli, 2007). Many teachers have included differentiation as one of their primary goals for professional development, and many administrators have facilitated professional development on differentiation for their staff, but these plans and training times often ended as merely plans or sporadic attempts at differentiation (Wormeli,

2007). The reason for this, as most educators know, is teachers will not spend the time creating five to twenty different versions of each lesson, for each class, on each day to meet the needs of all the students (Schmoker, 2010). This is not a realistic expectation for teachers. Despite the benefits of differentiation, for a model or method of instruction to be effective, it must not only provide a benefit to the students but also be viable for the teachers. Consistent differentiation in a widely-varied student population is not a viable solution because the time it takes for a teacher to prepare for this is not realistic given the other demands on a teacher's time and life/work balance (Schmoker, 2010). Research done on differentiation has shown that it complicates teachers' work and frustrates them, and attempts to differentiate often ended in frantically handing out a variety of worksheets (Schmoker, 2010). Teachers found it almost impossible to provide properly executed lessons for each child or group of children on any kind of sustained basis (Schmoker, 2010).

With the known benefits of all students learning in their Zone of Proximal Development and knowing that differentiating in a classroom of students with widely mixed prior knowledge, ability, and learning rates is almost impossible to sustain, a new solution must be designed to help students achieve. There is a possible solution that needs to be researched to learn its effect. It is called flexible multiage grouping. This grouping model allows students to be grouped by prior knowledge, ability, and learning rate rather than by age. This grouping model allows teachers to teach a more homogeneous class rather than teachers teaching multiple different types of students and groups in one classroom. Flexible multiage grouping also allows students to change groups as their abilities progress.

As an example, this model could be used on a school wide scale in the primary subjects that build on prior knowledge, math and language arts, in an independent elementary school (Spooner & Browder, 2014). For these two subjects, the standards that are taught would not be organized based on grade levels, but instead everything a child was expected to learn would be placed on a continuum. At the beginning of the year students would be placed in a primary classroom and tested during the first week of school. After the first week of school all grades and classes in the school would study math and language arts at a set time, for instance math from 9:30 to 10:15 and language arts from 10:20 to 11:05. During these times, students would move to the classrooms that best fits their prior knowledge, ability, and learning rate. The teachers would not be classified as first or second grade math teachers but rather as a teacher who teaches standards 15 – 32, for example. Theoretically, children would then be able to learn in their Zones of Proximal Development during this time and progress as they were able. When children mastered what they needed to from one class, they would then be able to move to another teacher who taught the next set of standards.

In order for this model to be viable on a school wide scale, students would need to be grouped with other students who are older and younger than them. This goes against the traditional way students are grouped in school. Multiage grouping currently occurs in families and in neighborhood environments, but the question about the effect this would have in a school environment needs to be researched. This study will address a major question with this grouping model, "When students are grouped based on their current ability, what effect does being grouped with older or younger students have on a child's self-esteem?" Many studies show the importance of self-esteem to

one's academic success, and this research will help show the impact a multiage grouping model has on a child's self-esteem. (Lohan, & King, 2016; Marsh, & Craven, 2006).

Knowledge Base and Practice

This research will attempt to provide valuable information to the knowledge base of grouping models that involve grouping students of different ages. The results of this research will specifically help educators have a better grasp of the effect multiage grouping has on a student's self-esteem. When the idea of multiage grouping is considered, the question of social or peer interaction will need to be addressed. Currently there is a plethora of research about the importance self-esteem has on a student being successful in school (Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Kugle, Clements & Powell, 1983; Papay, Costello, Hedl & Spielberger, 1975). There is also some research about the effect multiage grouping has on academic progress; although, this research is often inaccurately mixed with multigrade grouping (Matthews, Ritchotte & McBee, 2013; Smit, & Engeli, 2015; Smit, Hyry-Beihammer, & Raggl, 2015). Regarding the effect multiage grouping has on a student's self-esteem, however, there is a very clear gap in the research. There have been a few instances where research has been done to identify the effect multiage grouping has on traits that are related to self-esteem but not directly related to the effect multiage grouping has on self-esteem (Fosco, Schleser, & Andal, 2004; Gaustad, 1992). This research will help fill that gap in a very direct way and add to the total knowledge base about multiage grouping. This knowledge base can then be further evaluated and built upon to determine if a school wide model of flexible multiage grouping is worth implementing. If this research and other research about this model is

found to support continued research and ultimately a school wide model implementation, more research could be done to evaluate other aspects of the flexible multiage grouping model compared to a traditional age grouping model. This new research could then be controlled for variables in ways this original research could not. The additional research could further help educators understand the effects of a flexible multiage model and if this model warrants further implementation to fit the needs of other schools.

With this research, educators can better determine if a multiage model is beneficial to the development of students and potentially change the common practice of grouping children primarily by age. If this model has a positive impact on self-esteem, it becomes a more viable option. If the research shows a negative impact on self-esteem, it may reinforce the current method of grouping. When combined with other research about academic and social impacts, and if there is a positive effect, this study could help provide a better way to educate students

With the knowledge gained from this research, the implications for practice may be great. If this research and other related research show consistent positive results for flexible multi-age grouping, it could have a dramatic impact on how students are educated. The students who would most likely gain the largest benefits from this change would be those who are furthest from the “average student,” such as those who excel academically and start off the year already knowing most of the material they are expected to learn that year. They would have a better chance of achieving their potential. When grouped by ability, these students would be able to continue to grow and learn and spend more of their time in their Zones of Proximal Development (J. A.

Kulik, 2003; Loveless, 2013; Brulles, Peters, & Saunders, 2012; Brulles, Saunders, & Cohn, 2010; Gentry & Owen, 1999; Matthews, Ritchotte, & McBee, 2013). If they learn quickly, they would not be bored and waiting. Instead, they could move on to the next topic and continue to learn. They would no longer be considered successful simply by showing up and meeting the preset standards for their age. On the contrary, they could be challenged to succeed and would learn the proper relationship between effort and success. The students on the other end of the spectrum could also see incredible benefit, as they would no longer constantly feel inferior and unsuccessful (Chakrabarty, & Saha, 2014). Instead, the students who do not have the prior knowledge or who do not learn as quickly would be able to master the content with their intellectual peers. They would be able to celebrate the successes they have as they learn and progress through the standards rather than always feeling inferior because they know less and take longer to learn than the other students with whom they are grouped. They would also be more likely to learn the proper relationship between effort and success (Fischer & Rose, 2001; Forsten, Grant & Hollas, 2002).

The effect this model could have on practice could impact the entire structure of how education is conducted. Education could be focused on the growth of each individual student rather than students meeting preset standards. Each student's measure of success would be based on progress, and this model in practice would help switch education to be growth focused instead of results focused. A child would potentially see the goal of education as improvement rather than meeting goals, which have the potential to be too hard or too easy to motivate. This model in practice would allow a level of individualization of learning that is known to be impactful but is currently

not able to be offered on a consistent basis to all students (Schmoker, 2010; Wormeli, 2007). The flexible multiage grouping model has the potential to impact education and students in an incredible way, but research must be done to understand the total impact it would have on students. One of the primary questions that needs to be answered is related to the social component, which would occur when students of different ages are put into the same classroom. Namely, when students are grouped based on their current abilities, what effect does being grouped with older or younger students have on their self-esteem?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is an important and complex concept that affects many different facets of a person's life. Many different people have offered ways to define self-esteem. Băban (2001) offered this definition: "Self-esteem is an important dimension for any human being, whether child, adult or elderly person, regardless of culture, personality, interests, social status, abilities. Self-esteem shows how 'good' we consider ourselves in relation to our own expectations or with others" (p. 72). Albu (2008) suggested self-esteem is a person's ability to think and face the success and challenges of human life. Gecas (1982) writes that self-esteem is composed of one's competence and worth and refers to how a person sees himself as capable and efficacious. Dumitru (2001) states that the development of self-esteem comes from the individual interactions a person has with others in interpersonal, social, and group settings. William James defined self-esteem as a person's success divided by pretensions (Osborne, 2014). His view was that everyone has personal expectations, and self-esteem is determined by how a person perceives his performance compared to those expectations (Osborne, 2014). While these definitions each offer a slightly different perspective of self-esteem and how it is formed, several consistencies emerge based on these researchers.

The first major point is everyone is impacted by self-esteem. No matter the gender, age, interest, culture, or any other factor, each person has an opinion about his own abilities and worth. Can I make a difference? Do I have something to offer? Am I successful? Can I be successful? Am I destined to fail or to be a failure? Everyone has

various levels of self-esteem in different areas of life and of himself as a whole and is impacted by that self-esteem (Băban, 2001; Albu, 2008).

Secondly, a person's self-esteem is the perception one has of himself. The very essence of self-esteem is not a person's ability to succeed or fail but a person's belief about his ability to succeed or fail. This suggests self-esteem is more closely tied to perception about reality than actual reality (Bandura, 1977). An example of this would be a young soccer player who is the most skilled player on her team and who performs well in her league. Because she perceives she is better than those she practices with and that she is able to show positive results and receive positive feedback during practices and games, she has a high self-perception about her abilities in soccer and, therefore, has high self-esteem in this area of her life. However, after doing well for a year or two, she is invited to join a better team in her club and play in a division with more talented players. After she joins the better team and plays in the harder division, her self-perception changes. She is no longer the best player on her team. She no longer gets the same results and positive feedback in practice and in games. In fact, she begins to get beat by the better players and can point to her errors and how they cost the team a goal or a game. With these results, her self-perception begins to change. She no longer feels confident about her abilities, and her self-esteem that is tied to her ability as a soccer player begins to diminish. She has a lower self-esteem even though her abilities may be improving because self-esteem is primarily driven by perception. If her perception is that her abilities are getting better and she is only struggling because she is now playing with better players, then her self-esteem will not diminish because she will not perceive the challenges as a reflection of her own inability

to be successful but rather as part of the learning process. People's self-esteem is primarily formed by their perceived ability to achieve their own expectations or to achieve the expectations others place on them (Băban, 2001; Gecas, 1982; Osborne, 2014). This perceived ability to achieve expectations reinforces the value and ability or lack of value and ability of the individual. When people are more successful than they anticipate, their self-esteem rises, and when they are less successful than they anticipate, their self-esteem diminishes. (Băban, 2001; Gecas, 1982; Osborne, 2014).

The last major point is that a person's self-esteem changes over time based on experience, which can also include feedback from others. A person's self-esteem is not stagnant (Ana-Maria, 2015; Rudolph, Caldwell & Conley, 2005). It is constantly being shaped based on how someone perceives the events in his life. Some of those events are actual failures or successes compared to what the person anticipated, and some are based on interactions with others and feedback a person receives from others (Gecas, 1982). Comparison to and feedback from others are primary ways a person's self-esteem is shaped and changed (Rudolph, Caldwell & Conley, 2005). Comparing oneself to others establishes expectations, and expectations compared to results is a primary driver in one's self-esteem. This is why the earlier example of the soccer player shifted the girl's self-esteem. She compared herself to different players, and it shifted her expectation about herself and her gauge of success. This is a constant process that happens inside each individual. People see what those around them are doing and compare it to what they are able to do, or what they believe they are able to do, and then develop a self-concept about their own abilities and value (Bandura, 1977). There is also often direct feedback given. Another individual will communicate, verbally or

nonverbally, about a person's ability to be successful. This communication will then be filtered through the person's own perceptions. How much does the person hearing the comments value the opinion of the person talking? Does the person accept the comments of the other individual? It does not matter if the comments made are positive or negative. They will always be filtered through the individual's perceptions, and then based on the perceptions of the comments, the person's self-esteem will be changed. Because a person is consistently experiencing results from actions, comparing himself to others, and receiving feedback from others, a person's self-esteem is constantly changing. This is especially true with younger children and adolescents. The more experiences that have developed an individual's self-esteem and the stronger that person believes in his or her ability to succeed or fail, the less his or her self-esteem is shaped by new experience (Rudolph, Caldwell & Conley, 2005). This makes the feedback, comparisons, and experiences of children and adolescents, as well as those who are trying new things, even more important because they will have a larger impact on their self-esteem (Băban, 2001; Dumitru, 2001; Gecas, 1982; Osborne, 2014).

Self-esteem is an important component of a person's social and cognitive development. (Berndt, 2002; Pulkkinen, Nygren, & Kokko, 2002; Wigfield, Battle, Keller, & Eccles, 2002). There has been a plethora of studies conducted to understand the impact self-esteem has on other factors in a person's life. Many of these studies have focused on low self-esteem and have found there is a significant correlation between low self-esteem and depression, suicide ideation, delinquency, shyness, eating disorders, loneliness, victimization, and lack of happiness (Ana-Maria, 2015; Crozier, 1995; Furnham & Cheng, 2000; Gual et al., 2002; Heaven, 1996; Palmer, 2004;

Pelkonen, 2003; Slee & Rigby, 1993; Wild, Flisher, & Lombard, 2004). Not only is low self-esteem significantly related to these constructs, low self-esteem also makes it difficult for an individual to accommodate good news and often detracts from positive emotions when an individual has an enjoyable experience (Ralph & Mineka, 1998).

This is due to the fact that low self-esteem has been directly linked to the primary cause of depression, hopelessness (Pelkonen, 2003). An individual with low self-esteem is significantly more likely to show signs of hopelessness (Ciarrochi, Heaven & Davies, 2007; Pelkonen, 2003). When a person considers their circumstances without hope, he is more likely to become depressed, and that impacts all areas of a person's life (Ralph & Mineka, 1998).

High self-esteem, however, have been linked to higher levels of happiness and a higher quality of life (Ana-Maria, 2015). Higher self-esteem has also been shown to correlate with higher levels of self-confidence (Ana-Maria, 2015). This self-confidence has been shown to lead to an increase in the ability to solve difficult situations and aids in the accomplishment of predetermined goals (Ana-Maria, 2015). Higher levels of self-esteem have also been shown to correlate with the ability to develop strong friendships and have positive social interactions (Berndt, 2002). Positive social interactions and self-esteem relate to each other and have been shown to positively impact one another (Berndt, 2002). High self-esteem generates more positive social interactions and positive social interactions generate higher self-esteem (Berndt, 2002). Higher levels of self-esteem also create a general optimism that influences every aspect of a person's life (Ana-Maria, 2015).

Self-esteem is not only associated with social and cognitive development, but self-esteem has also been shown to increase academic performance (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003; Wylie, 1979). There are many reasons why high self-esteem has a positive effect on academic performance. Learning by nature involves acquiring new skills and knowledge that one does not currently possess (Gould, 2015). A high self-esteem enables a person to be persistent through the initial learning phases when there are high degrees of uncertainty and failure and low levels of success (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003). Those with low self-esteem more easily succumb to feelings of incompetence, self-doubt, and, ultimately, hopelessness (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003). These feelings inhibit a person from persevering through the initial challenges of learning and never allow the individual to learn and attain success (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003). This lack of success also reinforces a person's low self-esteem and makes him more likely not to persevere through the next challenging learning opportunity (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003). People with high self-esteem also set higher academic goals than people with low self-esteem (Ana-Maria, 2015; Ciarrochi, Heaven & Davies, 2007; Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003). They are also more willing to take on difficult tasks and find more satisfaction from progress and success (Ana-Maria, 2015; Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003). It was from the cumulative effect of these reasons that Wylie (1979) found a positive correlation between a student's self-esteem and grade point average, as well as a positive correlation between a student's self-esteem and scores on a variety of achievement tests. There have been various studies that have examined the relationship between self-esteem and academic

achievement (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003; Frant, 2016; Ciarrochi, Heaven & Davies, 2007; Kugle, Clements & Powell, 1983). Most found a positive relationship between the two. Some of the studies attribute self-esteem as the cause (Frant, 2016). Other studies have found it to be a reciprocal relationship (Kugle, Clements & Powell, 1983). High self-esteem helps one achieve academic success and academic success helps develop high self-esteem (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003; Kugle, Clements & Powell, 1983). Hansford and Hattie (1982) conducted a large meta-analysis in which they reviewed 128 studies. The results showed a significant correlation between self-esteem and academic outcomes. They concluded in their review that self-esteem accounts for four to seven percent of the variance in academic performance. Other studies have shown a positive relationship between self-esteem and academics by comparing self-esteem with standardized test scores, recent semester grades in math and English, and reading achievement tests (Bowles, 1999; Davis and Brember, 1999; Kugle, Clements, and Powell, 1983).

It is well researched and documented that self-esteem is important to the overall happiness, success, and academic achievement of an individual and the development of self-esteem is largely based on a person's experiences, interaction with others, and perspective on those experiences and interactions (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003; Dumitru, 2001; Kugle, Clements & Powell, 1983). Therefore, it is important to consider the environment and educational grouping students are placed in to help them develop positive self-esteem.

Grouping

One grouping model that is starting to be researched is multiage grouping (Kappler & Roellke, 2002; Lindstrom & Lindahl, 2011; Smit & Engeli, 2015). In this model, students are grouped based on ability rather than age. It is important to distinguish between multiage grouping and multigrade or mixed grade grouping. In multigrade or mixed grade grouping, students from two separate grades are placed in the same classroom and taught as two independent grades in the same room (Katz, 1995; Lindstrom & Lindahl, 2011; Smit & Engeli, 2015). This model is usually used because of a small population or financial restraints and has been shown to have many flaws for both the teachers and students (Kappler & Roellke, 2002; Lindstrom & Lindahl, 2011). This is very different than intentionally grouping students based on ability instead of age to create an environment that better meets the needs of the students.

Ability Grouping

There has been a lot of discussion and research about grouping students based on their abilities (Hattie, 2002; Kifer, 2001; Oakes, 1989; Stevens & Wood, 1987). The general idea for grouping based on ability is to create groups of students who are more similar in ability and prior knowledge so they can collectively learn at a pace and depth that is most appropriate for their individual needs. (Hattie, 2002). Many different testing methods were developed from 1910 to 1945 to measure students' intellects and abilities (Stevens & Wood, 1987). Once these tests began to be administered, the large differences between the abilities of the students in traditional classrooms were revealed. With this information, ability grouping and tracking gained momentum and became a

norm in secondary schools throughout the United States (Gage & Berliner, 1988; Stevens & Wood, 1987).

Tracking, or locking students into a path of academic rigor, offered a benefit for some, but it also restricted access for others (Collins & Gan, 2013; Oakes, 1989). If a child tested and was shown to have an above average ability, he would be given access to advanced curriculum. The student would then begin learning at a pace and depth that was more appropriate for his ability and be able to learn more efficiently (Collins & Gan, 2013). The student was also more engaged in school (Collins & Gan, 2013). However, if a child tested and was shown to be below average, he would be placed on a less rigorous track and never have access to the advanced curriculum and, in essence, be tracked for fewer career options (Oakes, 1989). Tracking came under heavy attack because it was restricting students' capacity to improve (Oakes, 1989). Being placed on a lower rigor track would also result in the child being even further behind. Tracking also widened the gap between subgroups of people who were not as advanced when they began school and made it incredibly difficult for them to move to the higher tracks (Kifer, 2001; Oakes, 1989; Stevens & Wood, 1987). There was also the problem of students being misplaced or having different ability levels in different areas. Some students had higher abilities in particular areas, but were being locked into a lower track without the ability to be accelerated in their areas of giftedness (Kifer, 2001).

These problems have made ability grouping less desirable to many educators, even though research has shown that more homogenous classrooms accelerate learning for all individuals (Collins & Gan, 2013; Gentry, 2016; Loveless, 2013). Collins and Gan's (2013) research shows that more homogenous grouping based on ability

provides academic gains for all students, whether they are in the higher achieving group or the lower achieving group. Their study included 9,000 students from 135 elementary school and was collected over multiple years. The findings indicate that ability grouping is more effective for all student groups as long as the curriculum is adjusted for the students. One of the primary reasons for this was the teacher's ability to have a greater focus on the needs of the learners in her classroom. This study is also supported by other research that has shown the benefit of ability grouping for all groups from the highest achieving groups to the lowest (Brulles, Peters, & Saunders, 2012; Brulles, Saunders, & Cohn, 2010; Gentry & Owen, 1999; J. A. Kulik, 2003; Loveless, 2013; Matthews, Ritchotte, & McBee, 2013).

A key difference between the effectiveness of ability based grouping and the negative impact of tracking is flexibility (Gentry, 2016; Kifer, 2001; Oakes, 1989; Stevens & Wood, 1987). Tracking involves locking students into a path of academic rigor and availability based on a measurement at one point in their lives (Kifer, 2001; Oakes, 1989; Stevens & Wood, 1987). Flexible ability grouping allows students to be taught in more effective homogenous groups with teachers focused on meeting the needs of similar learners, but it also allows students to be in different groups based on their abilities (Riley, 2016). Flexible ability grouping also allows students to change groups as their abilities grow. With flexible ability grouping, students are able to focus on what they need to learn, master the subject matter, and then move to more advanced material, which is essentially Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development in action. Students are all expected to achieve academically, but the pace and depth are modified to meet the students where they are and then help them

achieve (Riley, 2016). With ability grouping, students in the lower achieving groups actually have the ability to achieve at a faster rate of growth because they have more room to grow, and the higher ability students benefit from cluster grouping and being challenged by their ability-level peers (Gentry, 2016). Increased flexible ability grouping is, therefore, often a benefit to students, and the only restriction within current ability grouping is that grouping at the younger grades is restricted to their same age peers.

Multiage Grouping

Most of the research on classes with different age children is done with multigrade classes that are combined to save money in small rural schools (Katz, 1995; Lindstrom & Lindahl, 2011; Smit & Engeli, 2015). The research shows that these classes are often run as divided classes. The kids from one traditional age group are taught in their grade level subject matter and then given individual work while the teacher teaches the other grade level work. This type of environment shows mixed results for the students (from no impact to a negative impact) and has a consistent negative impact for the teacher (Smit, Hyry-Beihammer & Raggle, 2015; Lindstrom & Lindahl, 2011). While this model is commonly used in other countries and in lower socioeconomic/populated areas, the lack of positive academic results and increased stress and demand put on teachers to teach two independent grades in the same classroom has kept this grouping model from being a desirable option for most schools (Smit, Hyry-Beihammer & Raggle, 2015; Lindstrom & Lindahl, 2011).

In contrast to multigrade grouping, multiage grouping is intentionally grouping kids of different ages because they have similar abilities and knowledge (Smit & Engeli, 2015). This model is very different than multigrade grouping and offers many benefits

compared to traditional age grouping when used effectively (Smit & Engeli, 2015). In traditional classrooms, there is an incredible amount of pressure on children to perform and compare their abilities and accomplishments to their age level peers because the teacher expects them to all have the same knowledge and abilities as their classmates (Katz, 1995). Despite the fact that there is no evidence to support the belief that all children possess the ability to learn the same material, at the same rate, at the same age, this false belief is perpetuated by traditional age grouping and ignores the fact that children learn at different rates and possess different abilities (Katz, 1995). Gaustad (1992) identified multiple negatives to schools grouping students by age. First, students learn differently, and the ability to group them is limited when the initial grouping does not take that into account. Additionally, students vary in their readiness to learn, and this makes it challenging to teach them all together (Gaustad, 1992). Age grouped classrooms also promote the comparison of children to their age level peers and leads to those who are not able to achieve at the same rate as the top learners in the class to feel like failures (Gaustad, 1992). These feelings of failure have a direct negative effect on self-esteem (Bandura, 1977; Gaustad, 1992).

The research on multiage grouping has shown positive effects for the students in multiage classes (Riley, 2016). Studies show an increase in the reading skills of the students in those classes (Fosco, Schleser, & Andal, 2004). There has also been evidence of increased cognitive development at early ages and improvement in conversational ability (Fosco, Schleser, & Andal, 2004). Multiage grouping also has shown an advantage with social interactions as there is a natural peer modeling aspect to grouping children of different ages together (Kappler & Roellke, 2002). When

students are grouped with same age peers, it breeds a competitive and comparison environment (Smit & Engeli, 2015). When students are grouped with students of different ages, a more cooperative and helpful environment is created (Kappler & Roellke, 2002; Schweitzer, 2015). Instead of a child feeling like he must constantly prove that he is equal or better than those who are his same age, he begins to show leadership with the younger students and learn from the modeling of the older students (Kappler & Roellke, 2002). In this environment, each child is able to benefit from helping others and having positive role models. The multiage grouping model is also a more accurate representation of non-school environments. For example, if you consider communities, family structures, and workplaces, there is nowhere else in society where people are grouped only with others of the same age. Interacting with people who are different is an essential life skill. This life skill, as it relates to differences in age, is clearly missing from the traditional age grouping model (Schweitzer, 2015). Multiage grouping also allows students to be more flexibly grouped based on their abilities. By grouping students with similar abilities and knowledge together, they can learn faster and deeper (Gentry & Owen, 1999). It also allows students who learn at a slower pace to celebrate success without always feeling inferior because they do not meet the age level standard or because they are surrounded by peers who consistently outperform them (Gentry & Owen, 1999).

Effect of Multiage Grouping on Self-Esteem

There has been limited research done about the effect multiage grouping has on self-esteem. Way (1979) found that students in multiage classrooms had a higher mean score when tested for self-concept. One reason for this may be supported by the fact

that multiage classrooms have been shown to increased nurturance and harmony, while same age classes have been shown to increase competition and aggressiveness (Pratt, 1983; Smit & Engeli, 2015). The school environment can be a stressful place, and research has reported that children deal with stressful situations every day (Sotardi, 2016). When children feel stressed at school, their performances suffer and their abilities to learn decrease (Hampton, 2006; Sotardi, 2016). Multiage classrooms allow students to learn in a way that is more specific to their learning needs and in a more cooperative and less competitive environment (Pratt, 1983). Therefore, research has shown that students in multiage classrooms have decreased anxiety after their first year of transitioning to a multiage classroom when compared to stress levels in traditional classroom settings (Papay, Costello, Hedl, & Spielberger, 1974). This decrease in stress and anxiety allows the students to be more successful and, therefore, increases self-esteem and produces better academic and social results, which further increases self-esteem (Bandura, 1977). Another related indicator to self-esteem is a student's attitude toward school and learning. Milburn (1981) found that when comparing students in a traditional age grouped class to a multiage class there was a 30 percent decrease in dissatisfaction with schoolwork in the multiage class and a 40 percent decrease in the number of students who thought school was boring. Milburn's study (1981) found having students in multiage classrooms made the learning environment more enjoyable for the students. This increased satisfaction with school attendance and learning leads to a greater openness to engage in the learning process and to be more diligent in the work the teacher gives to the student. Increased satisfaction and diligence allows for greater

academic success and increases in self-esteem when these successes are accomplished (Bandura, 1977).

Despite these positive findings about the effect of multiage grouping and their implications on self-esteem, there is very limited research on the direct effect multiage grouping has on self-esteem. There is a significant gap in the research related to the effect multiage grouping based on ability has on self-esteem. This study will help provide research on the effect being grouped by ability with older or younger students has on a child's self-esteem.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Primary Research Question

This study was designed to answer the following question: "When students are grouped based on their current abilities, what effect does being grouped with older or younger students have on self-esteem?"

Research Approach

While quantitative research remains a more common method of research, qualitative research has increased in popularity over the past few decades (Prasad, 2005; Yates & Leggett, 2016). As opposed to quantitative research, in qualitative research, the researcher is not trying to stay as far away from the research as possible (Yates & Leggett, 2016). A qualitative researcher understands and accepts that some objectivity is lost because the researcher is trying to develop a deep understanding about the experiences of the people or events being researched (Yates & Leggett, 2016). As an example, if a researcher wanted to learn about people who have retired and are taking on new jobs, the purpose of the study would determine what form of research to use. If the goal was to determine what percentage of retirees take on a new job, if pre- or post-retirement income level is a significant factor in deciding to reenter the workforce, or if there is a correlation between age of retirement and reentering the workforce, quantitative research would be the most the appropriate form to use. However, if the researcher wanted to learn what the experience is like for retirees when they reentered the workforce, what the process is like when they transition from an established career to retirement and then to a new career, or what effect this transition

has on how they feel about their self-worth and abilities to contribute to society, then the best form of research to use would be qualitative. Qualitative research focuses on the *how* and *why* of a situation in a way quantitative research cannot. While qualitative researchers lose the large sampling size; clear, hard number-driven data; and the objectivity of quantitative research, they gain a deeper, richer understanding of the experiences and effect on the people involved in the study (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Yates & Leggett, 2016). The purpose of this study is to learn about a groups' lived experiences, emotions, views, and attitudes, without using a statistical procedure or other way of quantifying the data. Therefore, the most appropriate form of research for this study is qualitative (Strauss & Corbin, 1988).

A qualitative study is the most appropriate approach to learn about the effect multiage grouping based on ability has on a student's self-esteem because a qualitative approach will allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the effect being grouped with children that are older and younger has on a student's self-esteem. Self-esteem is a complex issue that should be looked at thoroughly to gain a true understanding of how it is affected. Understanding the total impact an environment has on a person is done through qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Since the subjects of this research are children, hearing the details about the experiences from the children and their parents should give a richer understanding of the effect of multiage grouping. Gaining a deeper understanding of the effect multiage grouping has on a child's self-esteem requires an understanding of the attitudes and emotions the child experiences and how the child changes in school and out of school based on the time he or she spends in multiage groups. Discovering the effect of multiage grouping also requires

understanding the perceptions and commonalities among students who are placed in these groups. According to Merriam (2009), a qualitative study will allow the voice of those involved in the study to be heard and common themes that come from interviews to be developed. This data will help explain how multiage grouping affects self-esteem. These are the goals of this study and why qualitative research was chosen.

Research Design

Within qualitative research, there are many different methods. For this research, a case study will be used. Case studies and the methods behind them are well documented. Case studies methodology is a strategy a researcher uses to learn about an event, activity, program, or process for an individual or group (Stake, 1995). Case studies are the preferred method to use when answering the questions *how* or *why*. This method is ideal for a topic that occurs in a real-life context and over which the researcher has very little control. This method can be used by a researcher to explore, design, or explain (Yin, 2003).

A case study was chosen for this research because the research focuses on a specific school and a specific experience common to all the students involved in the study. All the students involved in the study were in a classroom or classrooms grouped by age every year prior to this study. The current year of this study these students were grouped based on ability in multiage classrooms with other students who were younger than them, older than them, or both. This school's program of grouping students by ability rather than age is a specific phenomenon that makes their experiences unique and important to this study. This study's goal is to answer the question *how*. Specifically, how has being involved in multiage grouping effected the children's self-

esteem? These goals and settings combined with the researcher having no control over the outcome and the effects of multiage grouping happening in a real-life setting made a qualitative case study the ideal research method to utilize.

Context

This research was conducted in Marietta, Georgia, at a school for first grade through eighth grade students with dyslexia. It was a relatively new school that was established in August of 2012. It began with four students but, at the time of this research, had over 70 students enrolled. The goals of the school are to help students with dyslexia learn to read more proficiently and develop into independent and confident learners. The school's program combines remediation with enrichment and acceleration with the goal of preparing the students to reenter a public or independent school.

This school was chosen because they operated under a flexible multiage grouping model that groups students by ability. Because this school used a flexible multiage grouping model, there are many students who were grouped with other students of the same achievement level but different ages. There are very few schools that use a flexible multiage grouping model school wide. Therefore, studying this school offered data on multiage grouping that was hard to find and very valuable.

Participants

When selecting a sampling approach, is it important that the approach reflects the purpose and questions directing the research (Punch, 1998). For this study, purposeful sampling was used. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to pick specific individuals to participate in the study based on their experiences or other criteria. Being able to pick a specific sample of participants will allow the researcher to

gain valuable insight that would not be gained by random sampling (Patton, 2002).

Maxwell (2005) defined purposeful sampling as “a selection strategy in which particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88).

For this study, the researcher, with the help of the school administration, identified all the first-year students at the school. The researcher then narrowed the list down by identifying which new students have been grouped with different age peers for the entire year. The researcher also confirmed it was the first year those students had been in an ability grouped multiage classroom. The students were then selected to represent the various ways students could experience multiage grouping – being with other students who are older, younger, or both older and younger than themselves. Students of a similar age were selected to eliminate age-related variables. The current head of school made initial contact with the families of students who met the criteria to inform them of the study. The researcher then contacted the families and scheduled interview times for the families who agreed to participate. Before the interview, the researcher obtained written consent from the parents/legal guardians to interview the children as well as written consent from the parents/legal guardians to participate in the study. A total of nine families participated in the study. Of the nine students, three were the oldest in their multiage groups, three were the youngest, and three had classmates who were in grades higher and lower than them.

Data Gathering Methods

The method of data collection for this research was interviews with the children and one of their parents/legal guardians. Interviews are often viewed as a conversation

between the researcher and the person being interviewed. The researcher asks questions, and the interviewee responds accordingly with his or her thoughts and experiences (Esterberg, 2002). Interviewing others is a powerful research method because the researcher is able to learn about someone's beliefs and experiences in a deeper and richer way than most other research methods. Patton (1987) wrote it this way: "The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. We interview people to find out from them those things we can't observe" (p. 196).

The researcher began each interview by sharing initial information about himself and the purpose of the study to develop a more relaxed and open interview environment. This helped to establish trust and rapport so the interviewees were more willing to be open about their experiences and feelings. The researcher also made all participants aware of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time and ensured them that all information shared would be kept confidential.

This study used a semi-structured interview format. A semi-structured interview consists of a series of general questions each participant answers. There were also subsequent questions in each individual interview that varied based on the interviewee's responses (Bryman, 2004). Most of the interview questions were open-ended. One of the goals of the interview process was for it to be conversational. Open-ended questions allow for the conversation to flow more naturally and provide the interviewees more freedom to express their thoughts and feelings. The researcher was also careful not to use dichotomous or leading questions, as this can skew the information shared in the interview (Esterberg, 2002).

The researcher interviewed both parents and students to better understand the effect multiage grouping based on ability has on students who are grouped with other aged children. All interviews were recorded to ensure accurate transcription. The students were interviewed first, and those interviews ranged from 9 to 26 minutes. The student interviews helped the researcher gain first-hand accounts of the students' experiences and perceptions. The interviews took place at the school the children attended in an unused classroom after normal school hours. The students answered a small set of open-ended questions with subsequent questions, as needed, and with plenty of time for them to elaborate. After each student's interview, the researcher interviewed one of the student's parents in the same classroom to learn the parent's perceptions and observations of the effect of multiage ability grouping on the child. The parent interviews lasted from 10 to 31 minutes. The goal of these interviews was to learn what effect this grouping model has had on each individual child and what commonalities are true among the students who experienced multiage grouping for the first time.

All interviews took place in April and May of 2017. After each interview, the recordings were transcribed and reviewed to ensure accuracy.

Instrument Used for Data Collection

After the introduction of the researcher and the research's topic and purpose, the researcher asked open-ended, non-leading questions and then followed the main questions with subsequent questions based on the interviewee's responses. The questions used in the child and parent interviews, as well as the purpose behind these specific questions, are listed in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were checked for accuracy and uploaded into ATLAS.ti. ATLAS.ti is a qualitative research management software. This software was used to code the interviews and to identify common themes.

Colaizzi's (1978) analytic method was used to gain a clear understanding of the data collected during the interviews. The first step in Colaizzi's (1978) method is to read all transcripts to acquire a feel for them. After each interview, the interview was listened to and transcribed. These transcriptions were then marked with initial codes. Once all the interviews were transcribed, the transcriptions were read again to acquire a feel for them collectively. The second step of Colaizzi's method is to review each transcription and extract significant statements. The analysis of data extracted 246 initial codes (significant statements) from the 18 interviews. The third step is to spell out the meaning of each significant statement. This process clarified the meaning of the initial codes and led to the fourth step of organizing the initial codes into code clusters (Colaizzi, 1978). The 246 initial codes were grouped into 50 code clusters. Following Colaizzi (1978) method, these clusters were referred back to the original transcripts for validation, and discrepancies were noted to avoid the temptation to ignore data that did not fit. The data form was horizontalized as each segment was given equal value (Colaizzi, 1978). To strengthen the validity of the study, triangulation was used. Triangulation involves examining various sources of data to develop and justify common themes (Creswell, 2014). The data collected from an individual interview was compared to the student's or parent's counterpart and to the other participants in the study. The 50 code clusters

were triangulated, and eight themes emerged as themes which were commons among the participants and relevant to the study.

An example of how the initial codes evolved into the eight themes in this study can be seen below in table 1. This table illustrates how the codes pertaining to the students' perception of work evolved during the coding process into the theme, "Students felt the work was easier."

Table 1

Coding Evolution Example

Initial Coding (Significant Statements)	Code Clusters	Essential Theme
Children: Work is the same work Work seems easier Teacher explains better	Work is the same	
Parents: Work is the same Children are pushed Children say work is easier Children are showing progress Children are no longer avoiding work Homework is now done independently Children struggled last year with work	Work seems easier Children have a better attitude toward school work	Students felt the work was easier

Ethical Considerations

Participants in this study were given documentation before the interviews informing them of their rights to leave the study at any time. Because minors were interviewed, the parents also signed assent forms giving consent to interview their children. Participants were also informed that their identities would be confidential and

that no anticipated harm would come to them based on their participation in the study. All nine children and nine adults gave consent to be involved in the study and completed the interviews.

Limitations

Because of this research being a case study at a specific school, it is limited to the experiences of students at one school. While the findings of this study may be useful for further research, it cannot be assumed that the experiences of these students could be generalized to other students in different settings. The school used in this study is an independent school specifically designed for students with dyslexia. Due to the nature of this school, the student population and their past experiences are different from those of the average student. Many of the students had a negative experience at their previous schools and were, therefore, attending a school specifically designed for students with dyslexia. These factors could also have had an impact on changes in the children's self-esteem.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Participants

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact multiage ability grouping has on the self-esteem of the students involved in this study. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the participants to provide information that cannot be obtained by random sampling (Patton, 2002; Maxwell, 2005). All participants in this study attended a school specifically designed for dyslexic students that uses multiage grouping schoolwide for their reading program. The students selected were in their first year of being at the school and their first year in a multiage class. This criterion was used to ensure a common experience between those interviewed and to better learn the effect multiage grouping has on a child's self-esteem while the transition to multiage grouping is still relatively new. A parent of each child was also interviewed to provide a different perspective on the effect of multiage grouping.

Data was collected from 18 semi-structured interviews: nine with the students and nine with one parent of each student. Eight of the nine parents were mothers and one was a father. The students' grades ranged from third to sixth grade. There were five female students and four male students interviewed. Three of the students were in the youngest grades of their multiage classes and had older classmates. Three of the students were in the middle of their multiage classes and had classmates who were both older and younger than them. Three of the students were in the oldest grades in their classes and had classmates who were younger than them. The school used in this

study is specifically designed for dyslexic learners, so all the students who participated are dyslexic.

Table 2

Summary of Participants

Child Pseudonym	Parent Pseudonym*	Grade Placement in Multiage Group
Sam	Sarah	Youngest
Nicole	Nancy	Middle
Melissa	Meredith	Youngest
Ashley	Andrew	Oldest
Rick	Rachel	Middle
Dana	Deborah	Youngest
Tim	Theresa	Middle
Lisa	Laura	Oldest
Carl	Cindy	Oldest

*All parents were given pseudonyms that start with the same letter as their children's pseudonyms to help the reader identify the relationship.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted at the students' school over a three-week period. The students and parents were interviewed at the end of the school day. Data collected from the interviews of students and parents was transcribed and imported into ATLAS.ti. After this was complete, the researcher continued to read and review the data from each interview. Within each script, significant interview items were labeled as initial codes. Two hundred forty-six initial codes were identified. Reoccurring themes were

grouped together to be cross-referenced to identify 50 code clusters. These code clusters were then triangulated and eight themes emerged (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2014). Each interview was coded based on data the researcher thought was relevant to the study and could help explain the impact multiage grouping had on the self-esteem of the students. The data was horizontalized as each segment was given equal value (Colaizzi, 1978). As reoccurring themes were identified, the researcher gained a better understanding of the impact ability based multiage grouping had on the self-esteem of these children. Throughout the process of transcribing, coding, analyzing, and interpreting the interviews, the researcher continuously went back to compare new finding with previous findings to verify the interpretation of earlier data.

Identified Themes

The eight themes which emerged during the data analysis were grouped into four sections. There were three themes that were indicators of changes in the students' levels of self-esteem. Two themes were specifically related to the effect of being in a multiage environment. Two themes were not related to a multiage environment but were significant to the changes in the students' self-esteem. One theme was specific to the overall change in the self-esteems and confidence of the students.

Indicators of Change in the Students' Self-Esteems

Theme #1: Students Felt the Work was Easier

Theme #2: Students Volunteered More Answers

Theme #3: Students had a More Positive Attitude Toward School and
Schoolwork

Impact of Multiage Grouping

Theme #4: Multiage Grouping Encouraged Multiage Relationships

Theme #5: Multiage Grouping Normalized

Identified Factors

Theme #6: Size of the Classes

Theme #7: Ability Grouping

Overall Change

Theme #8: Students Showed an Increase in Confidence and Self-Esteem

Theme #1: Students Felt the Work was Easier

When the students were asked what they liked better about the classes during the current year as opposed to the previous year, four of them identified that the work was easier. The age placement did not impact their view of the work being easier. Two of the four who identified the work being easier were the youngest in their class, one was in the middle grade of the class, and one was the oldest in his class. Two of the parents also specifically identified the work as being easier for their children, and all the parents identified an increase in their children's abilities to complete the work. When the students and parents who specifically identified the work as easier explained why it was easier, there was a consistent theme. They expressed that the work given was not easier, but the children's perception of the work was that it was easier and their abilities to complete the work had increased. When Rachel described her son's work, she said, "He (Rick) says that it's the same work, but it's easier." Sarah also expressed the idea that it was not the work that was easier but the way it was presented and Sam's ability to complete the work improved. Sarah said the work is "easier. He's (Sam's) pushed and it's easier." The students also expressed the idea that the work itself was not easier

but it was easier to complete. Melissa explained the difficulty of work this way: “It's easy because we do stuff step by step. We won't just be going into something that's too hard for us and we'll take it step by step and if something's too hard, we can just tell the teacher and she'll explain it better than some other teachers could probably explain it.”

Theme #2: Students Volunteered More Answers

During the interviews, the students were all asked if they volunteered more answers in class during the current year or the previous year. All the students stated they volunteered more answers during the current year. When explaining why, the students identified common reasons, including level of comfort in the class, class size, and a more accepting/less judgmental classroom environment.

Some of the students explicitly expressed the increase in comfort level. Sam, Ashley, and Nicole specifically expressed that they felt more comfortable in their current classes. The age placement did not appear to effect the students comfort level, as Sam, Ashley, and Nicole represent the oldest, youngest, and middle of their respective groups. Other students who did not explicitly state they were more comfortable described ways in which they felt more comfortable. Class size was a significant factor. Six of the nine students identified class size as part of the reason they volunteered more answers. Rick said that a smaller class size encouraged him to answer more questions because he “thought I have more of a chance” to get called on. Ashley said the smaller class size allowed her to “know everybody and it doesn't feel really awkward.” Tim said “definitely (he volunteers more answers) this year.” He compared the current year to the previous year and said, “Where with that big room of people, if you get something wrong, it's a little more embarrassing to get it wrong.” Tim also expressed that the

culture of the classroom was different. He described his current classroom environments by saying, "It's definitely a less judge-y place" and "because if you get it wrong, it's not like anyone's just going to criticize you or anything like that." Lisa also identified the difference in the culture of judgement in the classes. Lisa said she volunteers more answers "because there's less people and they're all nice and not like, some people might laugh at me if I did it last year." A parent also identified the increase in her son volunteering answers based on his teacher's comments. Theresa said, "He (Tim) just feels more comfortable. For the first time like teachers are telling me he raises his hand, he talks. Not one teacher in six years told me that."

Theme #3: Students Had a More Positive Attitude Toward School and Schoolwork

All the parents interviewed reported a positive change in their children's overall attitude toward school and school work. Most of the students had negative experiences at their previous schools. Often the parents made comments about the changes in attitudes. When describing the change in her son's attitude, Sarah said, "Oh, (it's) tremendous. He doesn't complain about coming to school. He doesn't complain about school." Nancy said that her daughter now "looks forward to school," as opposed to when "she cried almost every day last year." Cindy talked about how this year was completely different and how her son "enjoys it. Even the parts that he might not 'enjoy'." Theresa became emotional when she described the change in her son's attitude, saying, "I don't even know if I can talk about that without crying. He's a totally different kid. I was told he would be within a matter of weeks and I could see it immediately. Like last year, there were lots of tears with homework, he hated school, he didn't want to go. This year, he's never said he didn't want to go." Andrew described

how his daughter also now wants to go to school. Andrew said his daughter “didn’t like school last year,” yet talking about the current school year, he said “earlier in the year whenever we had a week off, she really didn’t want a week off.” This was a consistent theme with all the parents. While the children did not like school the previous year, now they wanted to attend.

The change in attitudes toward school applied not just to attending the school but also to the work from school. Eight of the nine parents identified that homework and school work were a struggle last year with the parents trying to get their children to do the work. When asked to describe the difference between last year and this year, Deborah said, “Last year we were coming home it was an hour and a half, two hours of throwing fits and just being difficult. Within the first week of us being here she was happy. It was a completely different child.” Nancy expressed a similar story, “Oh my goodness. Homework could take 3 to 4 hours, easily. It wasn’t because she couldn’t do it. There were things that she maybe didn’t understand all the pieces to it. But she would get so ... It was fight or flight.” Nancy went on to describe how her daughter would end up “flapping around like a fish on the floor because she was upset.” Nancy also discussed the stress that would cause within their home. Other parents described the additional pressure they were having to apply to their child to get the work done. Andrew said, “Last year it was more like, ‘Have you read...,’ I mean it was like pushing every day.” Deborah gave the reason she thinks it was like this, saying, “She (Dana) was so done in school by the time school was done that the last thing she wanted to do was homework.” The parents described this year as completely different. The parents described the children’s attitudes as proactive and independent. Sarah simply said, “He

does it, and he does it on his own.” Andrew said, “She actually does her homework most of the time without being prodded to do so.” Cindy described her home this year by saying, “I don’t hear a thing. He just gets home and he goes and ... and this has been the case for many months now. He gets home, he goes and does his reading on his own.” Cindy also expressed the relief in this change by saying, “The fact that he says nothing and he’s fine with doing it is huge.” This change in attitude was expressed consistently by the parents and with obvious relief.

Theme #4: Multiage Grouping Encouraged Multiage Relationships

A common reference from both the students and parents who were interviewed was to the multiage relationships that were formed. When students were describing friendships in their classes, no student referenced grade level as one of the reasons for why they were closer friends with one student over another. Some of the students spoke about how they enjoyed being able to spend time with and make friends outside of their own grades. The school’s size and structure encourages kindness between different age groups, even the students who do not have class together. Tim shared a story about how he had been able to spend time with another child who was two grade levels lower than him and not in his class. Tim said the other child was “fun to talk with.” Tim said they “don’t get to hang out that much,” but the younger child “will always talk and say hi.” As he described his current school, Tim said, “The thing here is when you see someone at a younger grade, you know the person, so you’re saying, ‘Hello, how you doing?’” When students from different age groups were in class together, even stronger bonds were described. While discussing her classmates, Nicole identified the youngest child in her class as her closest friend, the oldest as next closest, and the child

in her own grade as the weakest friendship. Only two families identified tension within the relationships of the multiage class. In both of those occurrences, the tension was with a child who was in the same grade level as the child being interviewed.

The students interviewed identified qualities other than age when describing why they were friends with other students. Nicole said she befriended another child because she was nice, and the kindness of the other students determines the closeness of her relationships with them. Overall, kindness or niceness was the primary factor in how the students chose friends. Eight of the nine students identified one of these words as the reason they are friends with other students. Some of the students also identified the multiage environment as a positive factor to their social interactions. Nicole said having a multiage class is “kinda fun. Well, you get to know people in the other classes. Because then if you don't like ... It's good to know people in different classes so you're not just always kinda trapped in with the same people.” Tim said having a multiage class is “kind of fun because you get to talk to kids with other grades. You get to know people better.” This is why Tim “like(s) it better. You get to interact with all different grades instead of just interacting with your grade, and then mostly your class.” No student indicated a negative relational effect of the multiage classroom.

Similarly, none of the parents identified a negative relational effect of multiage grouping on their children. One parent expressed a concern about the possibility of an older child exposing her child to something that was not age appropriate, but she felt the teacher being present mitigated that risk. The majority of the parents identified the development of multiage relationships as a positive outcome of a multiage environment. Rachel referenced how Rick wanted to invite his 4th and 7th grade classmates from his

reading group to his birthday party and how he sees them as “just part of the group.” Cindy also talked about getting invited to birthday parties and how Carl loved getting invited to a younger classmate’s birthday party and how it was not “a big deal for him.” Cindy also referenced how it was like their street or neighborhood by saying, “There’s all different ages so I think that’s just normal.” Theresa also referenced multiage grouping that occurs outside of school and how Tim has “been playing with recently (a child) in eighth grade, this is outside of school. And then there’s a fifth grader that comes over and another fifth grader. So, it’s this mix but it’s really worked out well.” Theresa also said, “I think it’s been, it’s been good for Tim to have exposure to those older kids too.” Andrew saw a spiritual benefit to the grouping. He shared that he and his wife talk to Ashley “in a Church, Christian kind of setting that we like that kind of thing (being with kids of different ages) and that she’s more of a role model to the younger kids, just like she likes hanging out with the older girls, the younger girls like hanging out with her, too.” Nancy expressed how she thought it was a positive, especially for Nicole. Nancy had noticed some drama in Nicole’s grade, and the multiage environment had “given her an out.” Nancy shared how Nicole “loves those older kids” and how she thinks it has “been a really good year academically and socio-emotionally.”

Theme #5: Multiage Grouping Normalized

For all students in the study, it was their first year in a multiage class. One of the lines of questions was specifically focused on discovering how often they thought about the age differences in their classes. Was the age difference a major focus for them? Did the multiage classroom remain odd or different to them, or did they begin to accept the multiage class as normal? One child expressed she initially thought about the grade

level difference in a negative way, while one child stated that she thought about it in a positive way. The other seven students reported that they rarely or never think about it.

When asked to describe the kids in their reading classes, three of the students brought up age or grade level differences. In each occurrence, the grade level or age difference was a piece of the total description and not the focus. As an example, when Lisa described her classmates, she said, “John loves Oreos, he loves Minecraft, and he doesn't get that much sleep. Joanne is a third grader. She's funny, she's kind.” When asked more specifically about how the other children in the class are different, three more children brought up the other children’s ages or grade levels. Dana said, “They're older. They are in fourth grade. One of them has glasses. One of them has dirty-brown hair, and another's a boy.” It did not appear at this point in any interview that the students prioritized age or grade level differences above any other difference, such as wearing glasses or hair color. As Rick said, “Well, everybody's different. Grade level, age, what their talents are. Justin is good at definitions, and then me and Jimmy are pretty good at syllabifying and John’s just kind of good at everything.” The students who were interviewed primarily identified talents and abilities as the primary differentiators between themselves and the other students.

The children were then asked specifically how often they think about the other students being in a different grade level than them. All but two indicated that they do not think about the age/grade level difference or rarely think about it. Sam said he does not think about it and it never really comes to mind. When asked how often Ashley thinks about the different age grade level, she said, “Never. It just feels, since we've been in the reading class together, it feels like she's just ... It doesn't really feel like there's

different grades. It just feels like we're all part of one big grade I guess.” Most of the students adjusted quickly to the change in grouping and it had become the norm for them. Some of the children were aware of the normalizing effect being at the school had on them. For example, when Rick was asked how often he thinks about the difference in grade levels he responded, “Not much. It's actually kind of normal because I've gotten used to it here.” Tim also recognized how it was accepted at this school and had become normal. Tim expressed it this way: “You don't really think about it. Say for instance if you're in 5th and a 4th grader would come into your class for a day at a public school, you'd think it was so weird. It'd be like, ‘Why is he in here?’ Here, it's a normal thing. Nobody ever thinks, ‘Wow, there's a 4th grader in my class,’ or ‘Wow, there's a 7th grader in my class.’ No one actually thinks about that. It's more in level of where you are, instead of what actual grade you are.” For seven of the nine students, this was the case. There were two students who indicated they currently thought about the differences in grades or used to think about it often. Nicole answered that she thought about it “often” and went on to explain, “It's kinda cool at some points. Because we're in kind of an advanced reading class, and there's a fourth-grader in it. And that's cool to think about. And then there's two seventh-graders and two fifth-graders. And I think about how far apart fifth and seventh-graders are, and then I just start thinking about it and then I stop. I don't know.” For Nicole, it was more of an awareness, but for Melissa she initially saw it as a negative.

For Melissa, the multiage classroom did not normalize until the second semester and only after she had changed classes. Melissa was in fourth grade and began the year grouped with two third graders. Between the fall and spring semester, the school

grew and added another reading class. At this point, Melissa was regrouped with fifth graders. Melissa's change was not because she mastered the material but due to an increase in school size. Both Melissa and her mother Meredith expressed that during the first semester Melissa was frustrated that she was placed with students in a lower grade level. Meredith said, "I think she did get a little ticked and frustrated and like, 'They don't think I'm as smart as I am, and I'm going to show them.' I don't know if it hurt her, but she wanted to prove herself." For Melissa, she did interpret her placement with younger students as a reflection on her ability or other people's perceptions of her ability. Her mother said, "She (Melissa) felt like it was not a good thing to be with third graders because I must be further behind than I thought, I think, in her head. She was like, 'But I'm older.' She would come home and say, 'So and so is crying again.' I guess there was a lot of ... It was all girls, so I can only imagine how that goes." However, when Melissa was switched and grouped with older students, she interpreted that change as showing she was better and could now learn with older kids. Her mother said Melissa would come home and talk about the age difference about every other day when she was with third graders but once she was with fifth graders she did not hear about the grade levels anymore. Meredith thought this perception may have come from Melissa's competitive nature. As Meredith described, "She's so competitive. I see her trying to beat people all the time. She wants to be as smart as the fifth graders."

Besides Nancy and Meredith, the rest of the parents did not indicate they had observed any focus from their children on age/grade level differences. Two parents said their children had brought up the sizes of the students in their classes. One child talked about how another child was very tall; however, the tall child was in the same grade as

the child being interviewed. Another child referenced how he was the tallest in his class. Age-wise, he was in the middle of the class, and his mother said he has always been the tallest.

Even though rest of the parents saw no indication that their children were impacted by the grade level difference, the interview appeared to make a few of the parents question the multiage grouping. For example, Deborah said, "I think Dana doesn't really look at the kids as older or younger, which to me is a positive, that she's not seeing or feeling like she's different because of age but that's I think who she is." Later Deborah added, "I think for her it made her feel better that there are fourth graders in there, and that she was the younger one. So, if it had been second graders and her she might have felt different." After discussing the topic for a while Theresa said, "I mean, I think if they were in second or third grade that might be a problem but so far it's only been a one grade difference or maybe two grade difference." Laura expressed how she interpreted her daughter's placement in a multiage class by saying, "I do know that one girl in there is in third grade and she's in fourth grade. To me that means that she's probably on the lower end, but she's never mentioned that. Lisa's never mentioned that. I just know that."

Theme #6: Size of the Classes

When describing the differences between the students' current classes and those from the previous year, most of the students and parents mentioned the sizes of the classes. It was brought up in 14 of the 18 interviews. The parents saw the sizes of the classes as sources of accountability and increased interaction. As Andrew said, "When you've got a teacher with two or three kids, a lot more accountability, a lot more face-to-

face kind of eye contact going and that really helps I think.” This was a common theme among the parents. They felt the smaller class sizes were a positive and provided more individualized attention for their children. The students also brought up this factor when describing what they liked better about their classes. They made simple statements about the size. For example, Sam said his current class was “smaller”; Melissa said, “I only have three people in my reading class and last year we had 24 or 25 students in my reading class last year;” and Rick said, “This year, it's less crowded and this year I get more opportunities to answer questions.” Five of the nine students also identified the smaller sizes as something they liked better about their classes this year. Some students made simple comments about the class sizes, describing them as “smaller” (Ashley), “not as many people” (Sam), or “last year was really crowded” (Rick). Others went into more details about why they preferred the small classes. Lisa identified her current class as better because “it's smaller and you can have more help with the thing that you need help.” When Tim was asked what he liked better about his current class, he said, “Definitely that it's smaller, because with everyone else, it's just like they'll be talking. Everyone will start talking. It gets really loud. More kids means more distractions that people can make, so there's less distraction. It's kind of easier for our teacher to contain four or five instead of 30.” The smaller class size was a consistent theme among parents and students, and if the effect of the class size was discussed, it was consistently identified as having a positive effect. No participants expressed any negatives effects of a smaller class size.

Theme #7: Ability Grouping

Four of the nine parents and one of the students specifically referenced ability grouping as an outcome of multiage grouping. Meredith, Nancy, Rachel, Laura, and Theresa identified the alternative grouping and how ability grouping offered a benefit for their child. Meredith spoke about how “all of the kids in her current reading class are more similar and at the same level than they were in her other class.” She referenced the former year in public school when it was harder for her daughter to learn in that environment and described how she likes that her daughter is now “more in the middle. Sometimes she's first, sometimes she's last.” Rachel said, for her, “It just makes sense to do it that way, especially in this student population. They're working with the kids based on where they are rather than how old they are.” Laura said she thought the multiage ability grouping was great, and she “would rather them be in the same reading level whether or not they're in the same size or the same grade because, I don't know, I just feel like you're going to learn better when you're grouped appropriately academically.” Theresa also shared this perspective and said, “I'm glad they're grouping them together by ability. You know, it just makes sense. because, just because you're the same grade level doesn't mean you're reading at the same grade level. It doesn't seem to bother him a bit if there's a younger kid in his reading class. So, it's just not an issue. I think the kids (are) so accepting of each other.” When asked how long it took for her son to feel this way, Theresa replied, “Immediately.” Tim was the only student who spoke directly about ability grouping. Tim said he likes ability grouping “because you're all going at the same pace instead of at the public schools ... There'd always be people at different places. Then there'd be those kids that always get their work done, and then

there'd be those people who always had to stuff it in their desk.” From his perspective ability grouping was an advantage because “usually here, that doesn't happen when we're doing tests. We usually have people finish from maybe the first person finishing to the last person finishing, 10 to 15 minutes at the most, where instead there'd be people that would finish really quick at the public school, and then there'd be those two kids that were just still working on it 30 minutes later, and they take the whole class period.”

None of the parents or students expressed a negative perception of ability grouping.

Theme #8: Students showed an Increase in Confidence and Self-Esteem

When asked about their children's confidence and self-esteem, every parent indicated there was an increase in both confidence and self-esteem between the previous and current years. Due to the nature of this being a school specifically designed for dyslexic learners, all the students involved in the study had negative experiences at their previous schools. When the parents described the changes in confidence, they would reference it like Rachel did when she said her son “definitely has tons more confidence. He thinks he can do it, he feels smart you know where as the last couple of years it's been increasing, I've watched him have increasingly bad self-esteem towards school.” It was common for the parents to reference the growing lack of confidence and self-esteem they saw in their children. Nancy described it as follows: “She just felt not smart. She just felt not smart. And that is a really hard narrative to undo when they're older. I know that.” For many of the parents, this seemed to be part of the motivation for them to come to the school. They saw the academic struggle their children were having and the effect it was having on their self-perceptions. Sarah verbalized this when she said, “One reason I even looked towards ‘this school’ was he

said to me last year is, we were talking, and I don't remember what brought it up. I'm sure it was probably report card or something, and I remember telling him, 'Even though you struggle, you know you're smart. You just struggle.' And he goes, 'Yeah. I'm smart except in reading.' And I'm like, 'No, you're not. You're smart all around. You just struggle in this area'." Sarah also went on to say, "This year we don't have any of that talk." The positive increases in confidence and self-esteem were consistently identified by the parents. Nancy identified it as Nicole being "more willing to speak up for herself." Andrew said he saw the increase in confidence by the way Ashley was "willing to try things that she might not have tried before." Theresa said she saw Tim's confidence level grow "because she sees how Tim's contentment with who he is much, much higher. He's very happy." Cindy said she saw it in how Carl was "stepping into roles, and I don't mean that literally roles, but just stepping into places that he would not have before, and I mean that in a sense of wanting to be involved in things and wanting to be a part of things that I don't know that he would've wanted to before." A few of the parents made comments about the extreme nature of the change. Deborah said the change in confidence level of her daughter was "through the roof," and Rachel said her son was even getting "to the point where he's a little cocky about it." All the parents said that they noticed an increase in confidence and self-esteem in their children and expressed how they were pleased with the change.

Review of Emergent Themes

Data collected from the nine student surveys and the nine parent surveys revealed eight themes which helped the researcher learn about the changes in self-esteems of the students who were in their first year of multiage ability grouped classes.

The first theme that emerged was the students felt the work was easier. Bandura (1977) suggested the most effective way to develop self-efficacy is through mastery experiences. When children experience personal success, they often begin to believe they can experience success again. This was the case with the students involved in this study. These students had struggled in their classes during previous years. However, in their current classes, they were beginning to make meaningful progress, and as they experienced success, they began to see the work as easier and their self-perceptions changed. Many of the parents and students who said the work was easier also said the work was not different yet seemed easier. This also ties into Bandura's theory (1977) that suggested self-esteem is more closely tied to perception about reality than actual reality. As the students began to have success, their perceptions about the work changed, and their self-esteem as students changed. This shift in perception made the same work appear easier, and as the students outperformed their learned expectations, their self-esteem improved (Băban, 2001; Gecas, 1982; Osborne, 2014).

The second theme was the students were volunteering more answers. A willingness to be vulnerable and try something without knowing if you will achieve success or failure is an indicator of self-esteem. Every child self-reported that they volunteered more answers during the current year than they did the previous year. The primary reasons they gave for this change were their comfort levels in the classes, the sizes of the classes, and the classroom environments. The school's multiage classrooms were described by the students as "less judge-y," "nice," and a place where "it's not like anyone's just going to criticize you or anything like that." The environments

of these multiage classrooms helped increase the students' confidence in their abilities and willingness to volunteer answers.

The third theme was the change in the students' attitudes toward school and school work. All parents interviewed reported their children had a positive change in their attitudes toward school and school work. Avoidance and hopelessness have been linked to low self-esteem (Pelkonen, 2003). Many of the parents said their children would try to avoid attending school and would complain and try to evade doing homework the previous year. According to the parents, the students also believed they could not do the work during the previous year and began to feel hopeless. The change in attitude toward school attendance and independence with schoolwork and homework is another indicator of an increase in self-esteem.

The fourth theme was that the children developed relationships with their classmates of different ages. Shyness is a possible indicator of low self-esteem, and there were no indicators the multiage environment had increased any of the children's levels of shyness. When describing their social interactions and friendships, no student identified age or grade level as a concern or hindrance to developing friendships. Instead, the children talked about the positive friendships they had developed with children from other grades and how they enjoyed getting to know students in different grades. Multiple parents also shared how their children had developed friendships with different age children and how they saw it as a positive outcome of the multiage environment. The parents referenced birthday party invites, positive role models, and even spiritual benefits from the multiage friendships their children were making.

The fifth theme that emerged was that the multiage age environment had normalized very quickly for most of the children. The student interview was intentionally designed to begin by asking a general question and having the children describe the other students in the class. The next question in this series of questions was to have the children describe the differences between them and their classmates, and the final question was to ask specifically what it was like to have children from different grade levels in their class. This progression was used to learn what the students thought of the multiage environment and to learn how many of them would bring up the grade level difference on their own. Three of the nine students identified grade level when generally describing their classmates. The grade level comments were mixed with other descriptions like “loves Oreos,” “doesn’t sleep much,” and “she’s kind”. When asked to describe the differences between themselves and their classmates, three more students acknowledged the grade level difference. These three students also gave no special attention to the grade level and simply stated the grade level amidst comments about “glasses and dirty-brown hair.” When asked specifically about having other grade levels in their classes, seven of the nine said they never or rarely thought about it. One of the two students who said she thought about the grade level differences, often described her thoughts as neither positive or negative but just an awareness. She also added that having a multiage class was “kinda cool.” For her and the seven other students, the multiage class seemed to have no impact on their self-esteem, and the seven students quickly accepted the multiage classroom as normal and rarely thought about it.

There was one girl, Melissa, who had a unique experience and perspective. Melissa was in the fourth grade, and during the fall, she was grouped with third graders.

The school grew, and she was regrouped with fifth graders in the spring. She was the only child interviewed who was regrouped during the year. Melissa and her mother both expressed how she was upset in the fall and would bring up the fact that she was with third graders almost every other day in the fall. Melissa would make comments, like “They (the school staff) don’t think I am as smart as I am, and I’m going to show them.” Her mother commented, “I don’t know if it hurt her, but she wanted to prove herself.” In the spring, when Melissa was regrouped with fifth graders, she interpreted the change as showing that she was better and could now learn with the older kids, even though her personal performance was not part of the decision to move her. After she was moved, her mother said she stopped talking about the age difference. For most of the children, they did not seem to notice or feel affected by the multiage classes. However, Melissa did when she was grouped with younger children.

None of the other parents indicated multiage grouping had any effect on the self-esteems of their children, but as the interviews progressed, a few of the parents began to question the multiage model. They hypothesized about what would happen if their children were grouped differently or what it would be like if the grade levels were more spread out.

The sixth theme was that the students all had smaller class sizes in their current classes. This theme was present in 78% of the interviews conducted. The smaller class size helped the students feel they had a voice and an opportunity to be more involved. It also allowed the students to receive more individualized attention and specific help. The more individualized attention and smaller groups helped the students feel more

confident in asking questions. The academic improvement and increased participation in the class helped to increase the students' confidence and self-esteem.

The seventh theme that emerged regarded how the multiage model allowed for better ability grouping. Five of the parents and one student commented on ability grouping. All six of them saw the ability grouping as positive. The parents saw this as a way for their children to be with ability level peers regardless of age. They saw this as a benefit which allowed their children to be more in the middles of the classes rather than at the tops or bottoms. The student who referenced ability grouping saw it as a benefit because students were not finishing significantly faster than other children and then having to wait. He also saw it as a benefit because those who were slower did not have to "stuff it (the work) in their desk." Having ability grouped classes appeared to help with the self-esteem issues that can arise when children are constantly the slowest ones to finish their work. The smaller difference in ability within their classrooms seemed to help the students be less self-conscious and increase self-esteem.

The final theme was parents directly stating that their children's self-esteems and confidence increased during the year. All nine parents interviewed indicated an increase in both confidence and self-esteem. These two attributes usually increase or decrease together. High self-confidence and high self-esteem have been shown to correlate with each other (Ana-Maria, 2015). The low level of self-esteem many of the students were developing at their previous schools was one of the motivations several of the parents cited for coming to the new school. Rachel demonstrates this when she said her son "definitely has tons more confidence (this year). He thinks he can do it, he feels smart you know where as the last couple of years ... I've watched him have increasingly bad

self-esteem towards school.” Parents were noticeably excited and relieved in the interviews as they described the increases in their children’s confidence and self-esteem.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover the impact multiage ability grouping had on the self-esteem of the students who participated in the study. All the students showed an increase in self-esteem during their first year in a multiage ability grouped class. The students all volunteered more answers, had increased levels of confidence and independence in their schoolwork, and developed meaningful friendships with children of different ages. All the parents also reported an increase in their children's confidence and self-esteem during their first year in a multiage ability grouped class. While all the students showed an increase in self-esteem, self-esteem is a complex trait that can rarely be attributed to one factor. In this study, multiple factors were identified as having a positive influence on the students' self-esteem.

One of the nine students had an initial negative response to the multiage classroom. When she was grouped with younger students, she interpreted this grouping as an indicator that the school staff viewed her as less intelligent. When she was later grouped with older children, she interpreted that grouping as an indicator that she was viewed as more intelligent and, thus, became less focused on the grade level differences. For the other eight children, the multiage grouping was a positive experience from the beginning. For seven of the students, the multiage classroom was quickly normalized, and the students reported that they never or rarely think about the grade level/age differences. Several of those interviewed also reported the advantages of ability grouping and having students with more similar abilities in the same class.

During this study, multiple factors were identified that contributed to the overall increases in self-esteem in these nine students. First, the school had smaller class sizes than a traditional school. In addition, the school was specifically designed for students with dyslexia, and third, the students were grouped by ability in a multiage classroom.

The sizes of the classes were a key factor in the increases in self-esteem and confidence in the students. Even though there was not a specific question regarding class size, 14 of the 18 interviewees brought it up. In each interview where the person elaborated on the size of the class, the size of the class was described as a positive factor to the classroom environment. The parents saw the benefit of more attention for their children and more accountability. The students identified there were less distractions and they could get more help in the smaller environments. There was also a greater level of comfort in the classrooms because of the sizes. Five of the nine students said the smaller class size was one of the things they liked best about their classes this year. It was evident this created a more comfortable environment in which the students felt more confident. Beyond the students' comfort levels and preferences toward the smaller classes, they also indicated class size as a reason they volunteered more answers. A willingness to volunteer an answer, to bring attention to yourself, and to risk being wrong are all indicators of higher levels of self-esteem. All students in the study said they volunteer more answers in their current classes. Six of the nine students identified the smaller class size as part of the reason they volunteered more answers. In the smaller environments, they did not feel awkward like they did in the larger environments. They also felt embarrassed when they would get something wrong in the

larger classes. However, they did not feel the same way in the smaller classes. Being in a smaller class everyday made a difference in the self-esteems of these students, and as they took risks, volunteered more answers, and had positive results their confidence continued to grow throughout the year.

Another factor that influenced self-esteem was the specialization of this school. The school was specifically designed for students with dyslexia, and it was the first year these children were at the school. Being at a school designed for children with dyslexia and being with classmates who all have dyslexia made a difference. Many of these students had bad experiences the previous year at different schools. For most of them, these bad experiences are what prompted them to seek out this particular school. At this school, they felt accepted. They did not feel self-conscious about having dyslexia because everyone there has dyslexia. The fear of getting something wrong was diminished because they felt more accepted and less judged. The teachers also had a greater understanding of how to teach dyslexic students and expressed an expectation they could achieve. Being in this environment consistently clearly had an effect. Parents talked about the changes in attitudes towards school and schoolwork. Students referenced the “less judge-y” environment. It was also interesting to hear how fast this change took place. Some parents specifically referenced how they had been told their children would be completely different in a very short time. Then multiple parents said they could not believe the change and how it was almost immediate. When the students no longer felt different and could experience academic success, they stopped hating school and fighting their parents about doing homework every night, and their confidence grew.

The last factor that appeared to influence the students' self-confidence was that they were in multiage ability grouped classes. Being grouped by ability worked with the other factors to increase their confidence levels. When the students were no longer placed in classes based on age and were instead placed with students who were their academic peers, they could learn together. The students expressed how frustrating it was to be with other kids who would always finish before them and then have to sit and wait for them. They referenced how there were kids in their former classes who would "shove their work in their desk" to appear done because they did not want to be the last ones. They discussed the wasted time of the students who finished early. In their current school environment, they did not experience that. The students were learning the same material, helping each other, and finishing together or close to the same time. When the children felt they belonged in the classes and were not slowing down their classmates, their confidence grew. The multiage grouping allowed the ability grouping to occur without restrictions. The students were not locked into being with their same-age peers and instead found themselves grouped with their same-ability peers. Eight of the nine students interviewed adapted to this grouping very quickly. One factor that appeared to help the acceptance of the multiage grouping was that it was schoolwide. All the grouping for reading at this school is based on ability and these students accept that is how they learn at this school. For most of them, the age differences in the classes quickly became a nonfactor, and they formed friendships and learned with each other regardless of age.

More research needs to be done to determine the effect multiage ability grouping specifically has on a child's self-esteem. While all the students' self-esteems increased

during their first year in a multiage ability grouped class, this study was not able to determine to what extent the multiage ability grouped class influenced this increase in self-esteem. Other factors such as smaller class size and attending a school specifically designed for students with dyslexia were clearly identified as factors which increased the children's self-esteems. For eight of the nine students involved in this study there were no indications that being in a multiage classroom had a negative impact on self-esteem. To determine the extent to which a multiage classroom impacts self-esteem, more research needs to be done.

Limitations of Findings

This research was conducted as a qualitative case study, and the findings are limited to the specific population that was studied. This population also had unique characteristics that influenced their changes in self-esteem. The students involved in this study had a negative academic experience before their first year in multiage classrooms. All of the students involved in this study have dyslexia and were in their first year attending a school specifically designed for students with dyslexia. The smaller class sizes, focused instruction, and grouping with other students with dyslexia were indicated as additional factors that had a positive effect on self-esteem. Further research needs to be done about multiage ability grouping in different settings to discover the effect multiage grouping has on self-esteem under different circumstances.

Relationship of Findings to Other Literature

Although little research has been conducted to explore the effect multiage grouping has on a child's self-esteem, this study has similar findings to that of current literature. As students experienced success with academics and relationships, their self-

esteems in those areas improved. This increase in self-esteem allowed them to achieve more success, as Bandura (1977) suggested.

Every student interviewed experienced a positive change in his or her self-esteem. This change aligns with current research that states an individual's self-esteem is constantly changing, especially those who are younger or trying something new (Ana-Maria, 2015; Rudolph, Caldwell & Conley, 2005). As the students in this study achieved beyond their expectations, they also saw an increase in their self-esteems, as the previous research suggested (Băban, 2001; Gecas, 1982; Osborne, 2014).

Research has found that students show decreased anxiety and stress levels after the first year of transition to a multiage classroom (Papay, Costello, Hedl, & Spielberger, 1974). In this study, the decreased levels of anxiety and stress occurred much faster and may have been influenced by factors beyond the multiage class.

All the parents in this study expressed their children's confidence and self-esteems had increased during the past year. The parents also described increases in happiness in their children, which has been linked to higher levels of self-esteem (Ana-Maria, 2015).

During the interviews, the students and parents discussed the friendships and positive social interactions that occurred because of the multiage grouping. The students and parents expressed specific relationships that were formed and an overall social benefit to multiage grouping. These findings are consistent with the research that indicates there is a natural modeling aspect and social benefit to multiage classrooms (Kappler & Roellke, 2002).

The students described their current classes as kind and more supportive. This finding aligns with the research that states multiage classes generally have a more cooperative and helpful environment (Kappler & Roellke, 2002; Schweitzer, 2015). The students also referred to the more judging, competitive, and comparison-focused environments of their former same-age classes. This aligns with previous finding of same age classrooms (Smit & Engeli, 2015).

Conclusion

Through a qualitative approach, this case study explored the experiences of nine students during their first year in a multiage ability grouped classroom. Their experiences and the changes in the students' self-esteems were shared from the students and their parents' perspectives. For these students, their first year in a multiage ability grouped classroom was beneficial. They showed increases in confidence, academic achievement, and self-esteem and developed positive relationships with students in different grade levels. Eight of the nine students also quickly accepted the change to a multiage setting, and seven of the nine rarely or never thought about the grade level differences after a brief time in the new grouping model.

Other factors were present during the students' first year in a multiage setting that influenced their confidence, academic achievement, and self-esteem. The class sizes were smaller, the students all had negative academic experiences the previous year, and their first year in a multiage setting was also their first year in a school specifically designed for students with dyslexia. For eight of the nine students, there were no indicators that the multiage grouping had any negative impact on self-esteem. In addition, all nine of the students experienced a positive impact on their self-esteems

during their first year in a multiage class. More research in different settings needs to be conducted to learn the impact multiage ability grouping has on self-esteem.

Suggestions for Future Research

After collecting and analyzing data, it was realized that hearing the experiences of other students in different multiage setting would strengthen the knowledge foundation for the effect multiage grouping has on self-esteem. There were other powerful variables within this student population that made it difficult to discover the extent to which the multiage grouping affected self-esteem.

In this study, all the students involved in the multiage ability grouped classroom experienced an increase in self-esteem, and one student also experienced a negative effect on her self-esteem from the multiage grouping. Based on these findings, additional research should be done to learn the effect multiage grouping has on other student populations in other settings.

An additional study using the same format and interview protocol in a school that just adopted a schoolwide multiage ability grouped classroom model would be beneficial. Reducing the variables of a new school, different classroom size, and new student population would strengthen the findings. That potential study compared to this study would help gain a deeper understanding of the effect multiage ability grouping has on self-esteem.

References

- Albu, G. (2008). Interpersonal Communication. Polirom Publishing House, Iasi
- Ana-Maria, V. (2015). Self-esteem as an indicator of quality of life. *Ovidius University Annals, Series Physical Education & Sport/Science, Movement & Health*, 15(2), 570-574.
- Băban, A. (2001). Counseling School - Guide methodology for hours of tutor and counseling. Cluj - Napoca: Imprimeria Ardealul.
- Bandura, A. (1988). Organizational applications of social cognitive theory. *Australian Journal of Management (University of New South Wales)*, 13(2), 275.
- Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V. S. Ramachandran (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of human behavior* (Vol. 4, pp. 71-81). New York: Academic Press.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Baumeister, R. F., Campbell, J. D., Krueger, J. I., & Vohs, K. D. (2003). Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles? *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 4, 1–44.
- Berndt, T. J. (2002). Friendship quality and social development. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11, 7–10.
- Bowles, T. (1999). Focusing on time orientation to explain adolescent self-concept and academic achievement: Part II. Testing a model. *Journal of Applied Health Behavior*, 1, 1–8.

- Brulles, D., Peters, S. J., & Saunders, R. (2012). Schoolwide mathematics achievement within the gifted cluster grouping model. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 23, 200-216. doi:10.1177/1932202x12451439
- Brulles, D., Saunders, R., & Cohn, S. (2010). Improving performance for gifted students in a cluster grouping model. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 34, 327-352. doi:10.1177/1932202x12451439
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods*. (2nd Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chakrabarty, A. C., & Saha, B. B. (2014). Low achievers at elementary stages of EFL learning: The problems and possible way-outs. *International Journal on New Trends in Education & Their Implications (IJONTE)*, 5(3), 160-165.
- Ciarrochi, J., Heaven, P.C.L., & Davies, F. (2007) The impact of hope, self-esteem and attributional style on adolescents' school grades and emotional well-being. *Journal of Research in Personality*, (41), 1161-1178.
- Colaizzi, P.F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. Vale & M. King (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp.48-71). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Collins, C. C., & Gan, L. (2013). *Does sorting students improve scores? An analysis of class composition*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18848>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Crozier, W. R. (1995). Shyness and self-esteem in middle childhood. *British*

- Journal of Educational Psychology*, 65, 85–95.
- Davies, J., & Brember, I. (1999). Reading and mathematics attainments and self-esteem in years 2 and 6—an eight-year cross-sectional study. *Educational Studies*, 25, 145–157.
- Dumitru, I. Al. (2001). Developing critical thinking and effective learning. Timișoara: Editura de Vest.
- Esterberg, K. G. (2002). Qualitative methods in social research. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Fink, J. (2016). Schools Regroup for Success. *Education Digest*, 82(2), 49-53.
- Fischer, K. W. & Rose, L. T. (2001). Webs of skill: how students learn. *Educational Leadership*, 59, 3, 6–123.
- Forsten, C., Grant, J. & Hollas, B. (2002). Differentiated instruction. *Different strategies for different learners*. Peterborough: Crystal Springs Books.
- Fosco, A. M., Schleser, R., & Andal, J. (2004). Multiage programming effects on cognitive developmental level and reading achievement in early elementary school children. *Reading Psychology An International Quarterly*, 25(1), 1-17.
- Frant, I. A. (2016). Implications of self-esteem in adolescence. *Journal Plus Education / Educatia Plus*, 14(1), 90-99.
- Furnham, A., & Cheng, H. (2000). Perceived parental behavior, self-esteem and happiness. *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 35, 463–470.
- Gage, N. L., & Berliner, C. C. (1988). *Educational psychology*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Gaustad, J. (1992). Nongraded education: Mixed-age, integrated, and

- developmentally appropriate education for primary children. *Oregon School Study Council*, 35(7), 1–38.
- Gentry, M. (2016). Commentary on "Does Sorting Students Improve Scores? An Analysis of Class Composition". *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 27(2), 124-130.
- Gentry, M., & Owen, S. V. (1999). An investigation of the effects of total school flexible cluster grouping on identification, achievement, and classroom practices. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, (4), 224.
- Gould, M. (2015). Learning Process. *Research Starters: Education (Online Edition)*
- Gual, P., Pe´rez-Gaspar, M., Marti´nez-Gonza´lez, M. A., Lahortiga, F., de Irala-Este´vez, J., & Cervera-Enguix, S. (2002). Self-esteem, personality, and eating disorders: baseline assessment of a prospective population-based cohort. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 31, 261–273.
- Hampton, T. (2006). Effects of stress on children examined. *JAMA, The Journal of the American Medical Association*, (16), 1888.
- Hansford, B. C., & Hattie, J. A. (1982). The relationship between self and achievement/performance measures. *Review of Educational Research*, 52, 123–142.
- Hattie, J. C. (2002). Classroom composition and peer effects. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37, 449 – 481. doi:10.1016/S0883-0355(03)00015-6
- Heaven, P. C. L. (1996). Personality and self-reported delinquency: a longitudinal

- analysis. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 37, 747–751.
- Kappler, E., & Roellke, C. (2002). The promise of multiage grouping. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 38(4), 165-169.
- Katz, L. G. (1995). *The benefits of mixed-age grouping*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED382411)
- Kifer, E. (2001). *Large-scale assessment: Dimensions, dilemmas and policy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Kugle, C.L., Clements, R.O., & Powell, P.M. (1983). Level and stability of self-esteem in relation to academic behavior of second graders. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44, 201–207.
- Kulik, J. A. (2003). Grouping and tracking. In N. Colangelo & G. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (pp. 268-281). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Leont'ev, A.N. (1981). The problem of activity in psychology. In J.V. Wertsch (Ed.) *The concept of activity in Soviet Psychology*. Armonk, NY: Sharpe.
- Liem, G. D., Walker, R. A., & McInerney, D. M. (2011). *Sociocultural theories of learning and motivation: looking back, looking forward*. Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing.
- Lindstrom, E. E., & Lindahl, E. (2011). The effect of Mixed-Age classes in Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 55(2), 121-144. doi:10.1080/00313831.2011.554692
- Lohan, A., & King, F. (2016). Self-esteem: defining, measuring and promoting an elusive concept. *Reach*, 29(2), 116-127.
- Loveless, T. (2013). *The 2013 Brown Center Report on American Education:*

How well are American students learning? 3(2)

- Marsh, H.W. and Craven, R.G. (2006) Reciprocal effects of self-concept and performance from a multidimensional perspective. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 1 (2), 133-166.
- Marshall, K. (2016). Rethinking differentiation — Using teachers' time most effectively. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(1), 8-13.
- Matthews, M. S., Ritchotte, J. A., & McBee, M. T. (2013). Effects of schoolwide cluster grouping and within-class ability grouping on elementary school students' academic achievement growth. *High Ability Studies*, 24, 81-97. doi:10.1080/13598139.2013.846251
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2009.
- Milburn, D. (1981). A study of multi-age or family-grouped classrooms. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 62, 513-514.
- Oakes, J. (1989). Keeping track. In J. W. Noll (Ed.), *Taking sides: Clashing views on controversial educational issues* (pp. 290-299). Guilford, CT: Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc.
- Osborne, Randall E. (2014). "Self-esteem." *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health Research Starters*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 11, 2016).
- Palmer, C. J. (2004). Suicide attempt history, self-esteem, and suicide risk in a

- sample of 116 depressed voluntary inpatients. *Psychological Reports*, 95, 1092–1094.
- Papay, J.P., Costello, R. J., Hedl, J. J., & Spielberger, C. D. (1975). Effects of trait and state anxiety on the performance of elementary school children in traditional and individualized multiage classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 67, 840-846.
- Patton, M. Q. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Pratt, D. (1983, April). Age segregation in schools. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
- Prasad, P. (2005). *Crafting qualitative research: Working in the postpositivist traditions*. New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Pelkonen, M. (2003). Risk for depression: a 6-year follow-up of Finnish adolescents. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 77, 41–51.
- Pulkkinen, L., Kaprio, J., & Rose, R. J. (1999). Peers, teachers and parents as assessors of the behavioral and emotional problems of twins and their adjustment: the multidimensional peer nomination inventory. *Twin Research*, 2, 274–285.
- Punch, K. (1998). *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Ralph, J. A., & Mineka, S. (1998). Attributional style and self-esteem: the

- prediction of emotional distress following a midterm exam. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 107, 203–215.
- Riley, T. (2016). The importance of learning with like-minded peers through flexible grouping in inclusive educational settings. *International Journal of Learner Diversity & Identities*, 23(4), 33-47.
- Rudolph, K. K., Caldwell, M. S., & Conley, C. S. (2005). Need for approval and children's well-being. *Child Development*, 76(2), 309-323.
- Schmoker, M. (2010). When pedagogic fads trump priorities. *Education Week*, 30(5), 22-23.
- Schweitzer, K. K. (2015). Considering the community classroom. *Journal Of Unschooling & Alternative Learning*, 9(17), 19-30.
- Slee, P. T., & Rigby, K. (1993). Australian school children's self-appraisal on interpersonal relations: the bullying experience. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 23, 273–282.
- Smit, R. R., & Engeli, E. (2015). An empirical model of mixed-age teaching. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 74136-145.
doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2015.05.004
- Smit, R., Hyry-Beihammer, E. K., & Raggl, A. (2015). Teaching and learning in small, rural schools in four European countries: Introduction and synthesis of mixed-/multi-age approaches. *International Journal of Educational Research*,
doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2015.04.007
- Sotardi, V. A. (2016). Understanding student stress and coping in elementary

- school: A mixed-method, longitudinal study. *Psychology in the Schools*, 53(7), 705-721. doi:10.1002/pits.21938
- Spooner, F., & Browder, D. M. (2014). *More Language Arts, Math, and Science for Students with Severe Disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). The art of case study research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Steenbergen-Hu, S., Makel, M. C., & Olszewski-Kubilius, P. (2016). What one hundred years of research says about the effects of ability grouping and acceleration on K–12 students' academic achievement. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 849-899.
- Stevens, E., Jr., & Wood, G. H. (1987). *Justice, ideology and education: An introduction to the social foundations of education*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1988). *The basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tudge, J., & Scrimsher, S. (2003). Lev S. Vygotsky on education: A cultural-historical, interpersonal, and individual approach to development. In B. J. Zimmerman & D. H. Schunk (Eds.), *Educational psychology: A century of contributions* (pp. 207–228) Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Uffelman, M. (2011). Forging the self in the stream of experience: classical currents of self-cultivation in James and Dewey. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 47(3), 319-339.

- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Way, J. (1979). *The effect of multi-age grouping on achievement and self-concept*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED174593)
- Wells, G. (1994). Learning and teaching “scientific concepts”: Moscow, Sept. 1994. Vygotsky’s ideas revisited Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Retrieved May 2017, from https://www.distancelearningcentre.com/resources/Learning_and_teaching.pdf
- Wertsch J. (1991). *Voices of the mind: A Sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wigfield, A., Battle, A., Keller, L. B., & Eccles, J. S. (2002). Sex differences in motivation, self-concept, career aspiration, and career choice: Implications for cognitive development. In A. McGillicuddy-De Lisi (Ed.), *The development of sex differences in cognition* (pp. 93–124). Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.
- Wild, L., Flisher, A. J., & Lombard, C. (2004). Suicidal ideation and attempts in adolescents: associations with depression and six domains of self-esteem. *Journal of Adolescence*, 27, 611–624.
- Wormeli, R. (2007). *Differentiation: From Planning to Practice, Grades 6-12*. Portland, Me: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Wylie, R. C. (1979). *The self-concept: volume 2. Theory and research on selected topics*. Lincoln: University
- Yates, J., & Leggett, T. (2016). Qualitative research: an introduction. *Radiologic Technology*, 88(2), 225-231.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Applications of case study research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

I will interview 9 students and at least one of each student's parents/guardians. I will interview the child first for 15-20 minutes and then immediately interview the parent(s)/guardian(s) for 30-40 minutes. The interviews will take place from 2:30 to 3:30 in the afternoon at the school. The school has agreed to provide adjoining classrooms for the interviews. While I am interviewing the child, the parents will wait in the adjoining classroom. While I am interviewing the parent(s)/guardian(s), the child will wait in the adjoining room and work on homework or one of the electronic devices the school provides. For each interview, there will be four primary question with sub-questions and a final question. This study will use the constant comparative method and if questions are added the IRB form will be amended.

The students chosen for this study will meet the following criteria: the student will have been in a tradition age grouping model last year, and they will not have changed classes this year. For this study, three students will be selected who are in a class with kids who are older than them, three students will be selected who are in a class with kids who are younger than them, and three students will be selected who are in a class with kids who are older and younger than them.

Introduction student question: How was your day today?

Student Questions:

Central question script:

- Who is your reading teacher right now?
- Who was your teacher last year?
- How is the reading class you are in now different than the class you were in last year?

Sub-question script:

- What do you like better about your class this year?
- What don't you like about your class this year?

Central question script:

- How is the work you are doing in class now different than the work you did in your class last year?

Sub-question script:

- Do you volunteer more answers in your class now or in your class last year? Why do you think that is?
- Is the work this year harder or easier than last year? Why do you think that is?

Central question script:

- Who are your friends in your reading class? Tell me about them.

Sub-question script:

- What makes them such good friends?
- Who aren't you friends in your reading class? Tell me about them.
- Why don't you think you are friends with them?

Central question script:

- How are the kids in your current reading class different than you?

Sub-question script:

- How often do you think about the kids in your class being different ages?
- What is it like to have kids who are older/younger than you in your class?

Final Questions:

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your class before we finish?

Purpose:

Student Question 1: To discover their general perceptions of their current classroom compared to their previous classroom. To make the questions specific to their reading classes where they are in multiage class.

Student Question 2: To discover their perception about their ability to be academically successful in this new environment. According to social cognitive theory, people's belief about their own ability to be successful is a primary indicator about their self-esteem.

Student Question 3: To discover their perception of themselves in relationship to their peers. To learn if age or age related factors, such as size, effect their comfort and ability to develop positive relationships with the other students in the class.

Student Question 4: To learn how aware they are about the different age groups in the class, and how important the age difference is to them.

Final Question: To allow the child to voice any thoughts they were unable to share up to this point. To provide closure to the interview.

Parent/Guardian Questions:

Central question script:

- How is your child's reading class different than his/her class last year?

Sub-question script:

- What comments have they made that are more positive about this year's class than last year?
- What comments have they made that are more negative about this year's class than last year?

Central question script:

- What changes have you seen in their attitude about school this year?

Sub-question script:

- What changes have you seen to their attitude about doing homework from their reading class?
- How has their attitude toward taking assessments in their reading classes changed between this year and last year?

Central question script:

- How do they describe their reading classmates at home?

Sub-question script:

- What changes have you noticed in their peer relationships between this year and last year?
- How often do they talk about age or size differences in the classmates of their reading class?
- What stories relating to the age differences of your child's reading classmates has your son/daughter told you?

Central question script:

- What positive or negative effects have you seen from your child being grouped with kids that are older/younger than him/her?

Sub-question script:

- What changes have you seen in your child's confidence levels since he/she started attending his/her current school?
- What changes do you see in his/her perceptions about himself/herself?
- How would you describe the changes in your child's self-esteem over the past year?

Final Question:

Is there anything other effect you have seen from your child being in a class with kids of different ages?

Purpose:

Student Question 1: To discover the parent/guardian's general perceptions of the child's current classroom compared to their previous classroom. To make the questions specific to the reading classes where their child is in a multiage class.

Student Question 2: To discover the parent/guardian's perception about the child's belief about his/her ability to be academically successful in this new environment. According to social cognitive theory, people's belief about their own ability to be successful is a primary indicator about their self-esteem.

Student Question 3: To discover how the child describes his/her peers to his/her parent/guardian. To learn if age or age-related factors, such as size, effect their comfort and ability to develop positive relationships with the other students in the class.

Student Question 4: To learn the parent/guardian perception about the effect multiage grouping has had on their child, specifically what effect has the grouping had on the child's self-esteem.

Final Question: To allow the parent/guardian to voice any thoughts he or she was unable to share up to this point. To provide closure to the interview.

Appendix B: Consent Form

SIGNED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: The effect of multiage grouping on a student's self-esteem

Researcher's Contact Information:

Aaron Farrant

770-861-9786

afarrant@students.kennesaw.edu

Dr. Albert Jimenez

Ajimen17@kennesaw.edu

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Aaron Farrant of Kennesaw State University, #17-427. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project

The purpose of the study is to discover the effect being grouped with different age students based on achievement has on a child's self-esteem. The goal of this study is to add to the research about multiage grouping as a viable schoolwide grouping practice.

Explanation of Procedures

You will be asked to answer four primary questions and sub-questions based on your responses. You will be primarily describing changes you see in your child's reading class environment, peer groups, and your child's self-esteem when comparing the multiage reading class they are in this year and the traditional classroom they were in last year. These interviews will be recorded as audio files.

Time Required

The interview will last 30-40 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no known risks or anticipated discomforts in this study.

Benefits

There are no known direct benefits to the subjects being interviewed. However, the results of this research will help educators have a better grasp of the effect multiage grouping has on a student's self-esteem. The results of this study will also be shared with the child's school to inform them of the effects multiage grouping has on their students.

Compensation

No compensation will be given for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

The results of this participation will be confidential. Participants will be given pseudonyms when findings are reported.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation

This research will be conducted with students ages 7-13 who are currently in their first year of multiage grouping. At least one of each students’ guardians will also be interviewed.

Signed Consent

I agree and give my consent to participate in this research project. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3403, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-2268.

Appendix C: Parental Consent Form with Child Assent Statement

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM WITH CHILD ASSENT STATEMENT

Title of Research Study: The effect of multiage grouping on a student's self-esteem

Researcher's Contact Information:

Aaron Farrant

770-861-9786

afarrant@students.kennesaw.edu

Dr. Albert Jimenez

Ajimen17@kennesaw.edu

Introduction

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Aaron Farrant of Kennesaw State University, #17-427. Before you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions if you do not understand.

Description of Project

The purpose of the study is to discover the effect being grouped with different age students based on achievement has on a child's self-esteem. The goal of this study is to add to the research about multiage grouping as a viable schoolwide grouping practice.

Explanation of Procedures

The student involved will be asked to answer four primary questions and sub-questions based on their responses. They will be primarily describing changes they see in their environment, peer groups, and themselves when comparing the multiage reading class they are in this year and the traditional classroom they were in last year. These interviews will be recorded as audio files.

Time Required

The student interview will last 15-20 minutes, and the parent/guardian interviews will last 30-40 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no known risks or anticipated discomforts in this study.

Benefits

There are no known direct benefits to the subjects being interviewed. However, the results of this research will help educators have a better grasp of the effect multiage grouping has on a student's self-esteem. The results of this study will also be shared with the child's school to inform them of the effects multiage grouping has on their students.

Compensation

No compensation will be given for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

The results of this participation will be confidential. Participants will be given pseudonyms when findings are reported.

Use of Online Surveys

Online Surveys will not be used.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation

This research will be conducted with students ages 7-13 who are currently in their first year of multiage grouping. At least one of each students’ guardians will also be interviewed.

Parental Consent to Participate

I give my consent for my child,

_____, to participate in the research project described above. I understand that this participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I also understand that my child may withdraw his/her assent at any time without penalty.

Signature of Parent or Authorized Representative, Date

Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Address questions or problems regarding these activities to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3403, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-2268.

Child Assent to Participate

My name is Aaron Farrant. I am inviting you to be in a research study about how students are grouped in classes and what effect that has. Your parent has given permission for you to be in this study, but you get to make the final choice. It is up to you whether you participate.

If you decide to be in the study, I will ask you to talk with me for 15-20 minutes about what your class was like at your old school and what your class is like now. So I can remember everything you say I will be recording our conversation and I won't record anything without your permission. This study will help me better understand the effects of different types of grouping that are used in schools. I don't believe anything bad would happen if you decide to take part in this study, but you can stop the interview at any time if you would like to.

You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer or do anything that you do not want to do. Everything you say and do will be private, and your parents will not be told what you say or do while you are taking part in the study. When I tell other people what I learned in the study, I will not tell them your name or the name of anyone else who took part in this research study.

If anything in the study worries you or makes you uncomfortable, let me know and you can stop. No one will be upset with you if you change your mind and decide not to participate. You are free to ask questions at any time and you can talk to your parent any time you want.

Put an X on this line if it is okay for me to record you _____

If you want to be in the study, sign or print your name on the line below:

Child's Name and Signature, Date

Check which of the following applies

- Child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

- Child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

Name of parent/guardian who gave consent for child to participate

Signature of person obtaining assent, Date

Appendix D: IRB Approval

Aaron Farrant

Re: Your follow up submission of 3/3/2017, Study #17-427: The effect of multiage grouping on a student's self-esteem

Dear Mr. Farrant:

Your application has been reviewed by IRB members. Your study is eligible for expedited review under the FDA and DHHS (OHRP) designation of category 7 - Individual or group characteristics or behavior.

This is to confirm that your application has been approved. The protocol approved is Taped interviews conducted with the children who are in multiage grouping and the parents/guardians of children who are in multiage grouped classrooms. The consent procedure described is in effect.

NOTE: All surveys, recruitment flyers/emails, and consent forms must include the IRB study number noted above, prominently displayed on the first page of all materials.

You are granted permission to conduct your study as described in your application effective immediately. The IRB calls your attention to the following obligations as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. The study is subject to continuing review on or before 3/13/2018. At least two weeks prior to that time, go to <http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/progress-report-form.php> to submit a progress report. Progress reports not received in a timely manner will result in expiration and closure of the study.

2. Any proposed changes to the approved study must be reported and approved prior to implementation. This is accomplished through submission of a progress report along with revised consent forms and survey instruments.

3. All records relating to conducted research, including signed consent documents, must be retained for at least three years following completion of the research. You are responsible for ensuring that all records are accessible for inspection by authorized representatives as needed. Should you leave or end your professional relationship with KSU for any reason, you are responsible for providing the IRB with information regarding the housing of research records and who will maintain control over the records during this period.

4. Unanticipated problems or adverse events relating to the research must be reported promptly to the IRB. See <http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/reporting-unanticipated-problems.php> for definitions and reporting guidance.

5. A final progress report should be provided to the IRB at the closure of the study.

Contact the IRB at irb@kennesaw.edu or at [\(470\) 578-2268](tel:(470)578-2268) if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.
KSU Institutional Review Board Chair and Director

cc: ajimen17@kennesaw.edu