Teaching in Multi-Classes

An INTO Report
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Foreword

Teachers are increasingly being expected to make a significant difference in children's lives, at a time when communities are changing, children are less compliant, and there is an increasing emphasis on social work in the job. As teachers, we must be given the necessary time and space to give appropriate attention to each individual child. It is only teachers who are in a position to create good teaching and appropriate learning environments. In multi-class situations, teachers face additional challenges in addressing these demands.

Multi-class or multigrade teaching is not confined to Ireland. However, very little research has been carried out in Ireland in relation to multi-class teaching. According to research carried out elsewhere, it has been shown that multi-class teaching can be quite successful and beneficial for pupils. There are indications that this may also be the case in Ireland. In spite of challenges arising from large classes, inadequate resources, lack of space, teachers strive to provide a broad curricular experience for their pupils in multi-classes - though often demanding in terms of planning and preparation. Multi-classes are predominantly, but not exclusively, found in small schools. Their unique dynamic has yet to be properly recognised by policy-makers and teacher educators.

Part one of this publication includes the background paper on multi-class teaching, which was presented at the INTO Consultative Conference on Education, held in Galway, in November 2001. The proceedings of the conference are contained in part two. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all contributors and guest presenters at the conference, including members of the INTO Education Committee, who were involved in the research which was carried out in preparation for this report. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Dominic O'Sullivan, from Co Wexford, and Sharon O'Driscoll, from Co Cork, who contributed to the literature review, and Helen Keenan, from Co Longford, whose dissertation on small schools also informed the report. The Organization appreciates the work of Claire Garvey, Ann McConnell and Lori Kealy in preparing the report for publication. A special word of thanks to Deirbhile Nic Craith, Senior Official/Education Officer who had overall responsibility for the compilation and editing of the report.

It is hoped that this report will be seen as a contribution to research on multi-class teaching in primary schools in Ireland.

John Carr, General Secretary, July 2003
Part II

Teaching in Multi-Classes

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT
Introduction

Multi-class teaching refers to the practice of placing pupils of a different standard or grade under the care of a single teacher. It generally refers to the teaching of students of different ages, grades and abilities in the same group. Terms such as ‘multi-level’, ‘multiple class’, ‘composite class’, ‘multigrade class’ and, in the case of one-teacher schools, ‘unitary schools’ are also found in the literature. Multi-class teaching – as opposed to mono-grade teaching in which students within the same grade are assumed to be more similar in terms of age and ability – may be defined as the teaching by one teacher of children working in two or more grades or age groups and in the one classroom.

The most recent Department of Education and Science statistics (2000/2001) indicate that 165,714 pupils in Irish primary schools are taught in multi-class or consecutive grade classes. This corresponds with 39% of all primary school pupils. About 43% of mainstream teachers teach two or more grades. While concern has frequently been expressed as to the nature and effectiveness of multigrade teaching, as evidenced by the discussion contained in Chapter 6 of the 1994 Report of the National Convention on Education, little or no research has been carried out on multi-class teaching in the Irish setting.

One of the most distinctive features of multi-class teaching in Ireland is the wide age-range of the pupils in the classes. This feature of multi-class teaching will, more than any other, determine teachers’ organisational approaches and teaching methodologies. In the context of many changes in the educational system since the late 1980s – such as legislative changes, curriculum and resourcing – it is timely to consider their impact on the situation in multi-classes.

Multi-classes are a significant feature of the Irish primary school system. The majority of these classes are to be found in rural areas but there is a number of schools in urban areas who have multi-classes. Generally these may be found in:

- Developing schools: There will often be a number of multigrade classes in the early years of expansion.
- Declining schools: When the demographic situation changes and schools have a declining pupil population.
Schools whose pupils are drawn from a minority religious denomination.
- Schools of almost any size which may have to include multigrade classes because of the ratio of teachers to pupil numbers.

Multi-class teaching is not unique to the Irish educational system. It features significantly in Britain and North America, Africa and Asia, and is often referred to as teaching of composite classes, mixed-age classes, vertically grouped classes or combination classes. The multigrade classroom is an organisational pattern widely used in schools in the USA. Early in the twentieth century 70.8% of all public schools in the US were one-room multigrade schools. By 1980 less than 1% of these “unitary” schools remained. Yet multigrade teaching still remains a feature of the educational system in the USA. In the 1970s multigrade teaching received new attention when “open education” became influential in curriculum and instructional models. These models were commonly implemented with multigrade classrooms. Open education became a major educational innovation and as a result multigrade classrooms received new attention. Studies compared the effectiveness of “open” classrooms (multigrade with student centred ethos and methods) and “regular” classrooms (single grade with traditional ethos and methods). It was learnt that teachers needed to be trained to work in a multigrade classroom as the skills they needed to be effective were simply not part of their prior training.

There are also some interesting research findings from developing countries in relation to multigrade teaching. In Vietnam, multigrade teachers are given specific training in multigrade teaching. Children sit in grade groups facing their own blackboard and the teacher moves frequently between the two groups. Class sizes are usually of not more than 20 children. The extra work involved in multigrade teaching is recognised by giving teachers 50% additional salary for two grades and 75% for three or more grades. In contrast, the bonus offered to teachers in Peru, where 69% of the total rural teaching force in Peru teach in multigrade classrooms is $13 a month. These schools have severe problems in relation to infrastructure, access to services, availability of class furniture and teachers live in precarious conditions. There are few incentives to teach in these conditions apart from the bonus. Formal teacher training in Peru does not instruct teachers in multigrade methodology. A third country with a high number of multigrade schools is Sri Lanka where 1,252 schools out of the 10,120 schools have less than three teachers. Primary teachers in multigrade schools face the difficulty of organising the national curriculum – which is organised towards teaching in monograde schools – in order to suit their teaching and learning needs. There are no particular incentives for teachers in Ireland to teach in multigrade classrooms, though it is clear that teachers in such situations do face many additional challenges.

1. Institute of Education University of London website: www.ioe.ac.uk/multigrade
Challenges of Multi-Class Teaching

There are many challenges for teachers in relation to teaching in multigrade classrooms. Class organisation, instruction and management are demanding and complicated. Teaching different courses at different grade levels to pupils at different developmental levels and keeping all students engaged in meaningful work at all times, is a challenge. It requires a high degree of organisation and also requires that the teacher be willing to allow students to take responsibility for their own learning. The implications for teacher educators and parents are far reaching.

There is a perception that teaching in a multigrade classroom is more of a challenge to the teacher than monograde teaching. When pupil diversity increases greater demands are placed on the cognitive and emotional resources of the teacher. Research on the multigrade classroom (Miller, 1991) identified six key instructional dimensions which affect successful multigrade teaching:

1) Classroom organisation: Instructional resources and the physical environment to facilitate learning.
2) Classroom management and discipline: Classroom schedules and routines that promote clear, predictable instructional patterns, especially those that enhance student responsibility for their own learning.
3) Instructional organisation and curriculum: Instructional strategies and routines for a maximum of co-operative and self-directed student learning based on diagnosed student needs. Also includes the effective use of time.
4) Instructional delivery and grouping: Methods that improve the quality of instruction, including strategies for organising group learning activities across and within group levels.
5) Self-directed learning: Students’ skills and strategies for a high level of independence and efficiency in learning individually or in combination with other students.
6) Peer tutoring: Classroom routines and students’ skills in serving as “teachers” to other students within and across the differing grade levels.

Small Schools

For the most part discussion on multi-class teaching is informed by research on small schools. While some small schools, for example infant or junior schools, may be organised entirely on a single-grade basis, multi-class teaching features predominantly in schools with enrolments of less than 100 pupils and which cater for pupils between the ages of 4 and 11/12 (‘all-through’ schools). Such schools are the fabric of primary education provision in rural Ireland in particular.

A recent Irish study by Keenan (1999) focused on two-teacher schools and challenged the notion contained in Charting Our Education Future (1995) that one to three teacher schools are “educationally unsound”. The study traced the position of two-
teachina schools from the 1960s to the 1990s in the Midland region (Longford, Westmeath and Roscommon). The research attempted to look at the present position of these schools vis-à-vis the curriculum they offer their pupils. Evidence from the study suggests that the small school provides as wide and varied a curriculum as any school.

However, it was discovered that small schools:

- Suffer from curriculum overload.
- Make the administrative and teaching duties increasingly difficult.
- Make for isolation of the teachers.
- Have extremely poor ancillary services – a factor in need of immediate remediation.

Neverthelesss, the main finding of the study was that there is "little evidence to suggest that two-teacher schools are educationally unsound".

Most of the literature on small schools which emanates from the rural areas of Scotland, England, Canada, Norway and Sweden supports, in the main, the findings of Keenan’s 1999 study of two-teacher schools in the Irish Midlands. Much of the early literature from these countries agreed with the Green Paper’s (1992) statement that "on purely educational grounds, however, there are disadvantages in smaller schools".

However, later research – particularly that of Bell and Sigsworth (1987), Gatton and Patrick (1990) and Darnell and Simpson (1981) – seems to indicate that achievement is not associated with the size of schools. For instance, Darnell and Simpson point out that it is an assumption rather than a fact that the urban primary school is the model to which all should aspire.

The early studies – for instance, Plowden and Giltins – directed their main concerns towards the question of curriculum in small rural schools. Plowden and Giltins postulated that in small rural schools "some aspects of the curriculum such as drama, physical education and science tend to be weak" and that "in the larger primary school, it is possible to use the special skills and exchanges of staff or some "specialist' teaching".

Bell and Sigsworth, however, found little indication of a restricted curriculum in small rural schools. Furthermore, a study of the breadth of the curriculum in rural schools carried out in Aston University (1981) found that: "Music, one of the two subjects generally considered difficult to provide for, had good provision in all the schools. Physical education, the other subject area most often regarded as difficult to provide for was not seriously restricted". In other words, what later studies of small schools seem to indicate is that when small schools are managed in ways that promote effective teaching and learning they are fully capable of matching the results achieved in larger schools.

Another allegation against small schools is that they cannot provide adequately sized peer groups for their children who consequently suffer socially and academically. However, such research as exists – for instance Meyenn (1980) and Finch (1986) –
supports rather than condemns the quality of interpersonal relationships which small schools can generate. In similar vein, there are findings, which reveal that children who transferred from small schools to secondary schools had little difficulty in relating to others and did so regardless of age or sex boundaries.

Concerns have also been expressed about teacher isolation in small schools but Bell and Sigsworth argue that every teacher may suffer from a sense of isolation even in a large urban school. They add that there may be a greater professional dialogue in a small school because of the nature of internal relationships.

In summary, later research appears to indicate that negative stigma attributed to small schools is unfounded and points to the fact that advantages and disadvantages associated with small schools may be in the eye of the beholder. Finally, the research indicates that it is not school size but rather the identity and nature of the head teacher that determines the success or failure of a school and that the quality of teaching in the school supersedes all other factors.

**Conclusion**

The dearth of research on multi-class teaching in Ireland led to the Education Committee’s decision to conduct some research in this area. It was decided to carry out semi-structured interviews with teachers of multi-classes, as it was considered that this was the most appropriate form for eliciting views which would be of relevance to this research. A total of 12 interviews were carried out with teachers of various experiences and in various geographical locations. A profile of the respondents is outlined in the Appendix I. The interviews consisted of both closed and open-ended questions. Exploratory questions enabled respondents to talk freely about the issues under consideration. A copy of the questions are contained in the Appendix 2. All interviewees were asked core questions on the following themes: curriculum, school planning, classroom organisation, information and communication technology, teacher education and professional development, staff relations, special needs, school organisation and administration and advantages and disadvantages pertaining to multi-class settings. All interviews were recorded – with permission of the respondents – and transcribed. The transcripts were subsequently analysed under the theme headings mentioned above. For the purposes of this report the term ‘multi-class’ will be used throughout.

**Structure of the report**

Section A of each chapter includes a brief overview of literature on the topics listed below. In addition, in Section B of the chapters, the collated views of the respondents who participated in the interviews conducted by the Education Committee are
included. Concluding comments are offered at the end of each section.

1. Curriculum and Planning
2. Classroom Organisation
3. Early Childhood Education
4. Special Needs
5. School Organisation
6. Effects on Pupils
Curriculum and Planning

SECTION A: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Report of the Review on the Primary School Curriculum (1990) or the INTO Survey of the Primary School Curriculum (1996) did not make reference to the nature of the curriculum in multi-classes. However, criticism as to the breadth and quality of curriculum in multi-classes can be traced as far back as the publication of the influential Plowden Report of 1967. One of its conclusions was that at least three teachers were required in a primary school to provide an adequate range of subjects. In the intervening years reports such as Better Schools issued by the British inspectorate in 1985 and that of the Three Wise Men (Alexander et al, 1992) supported this idea, going so far as to suggest that schools should have at least six teachers, one to act as subject specialist or co-ordinator in each area of the curriculum. An inference to be drawn was that schools organised on a single-grade basis were in a better position to offer a curriculum with sufficient breadth and progression. Resonance of these ideas can be heard in the 1991 OECD Report on Educational Policies in Ireland.

The PRISM (UK) Research Project

Many evaluations carried out have not sustained the view that the curriculum offered in small schools is deficient. Between 1983 and 1986 the British Department of Education and a number of local educational authorities commissioned the 'Curriculum Provision In Small Schools' research project, popularly referred to as PRISM, to examine the curriculum in 68 small schools. Sixty-three schools had 100 pupils or less. The average enrolment was 55 pupils. The project involved interviews with class teachers in addition to teacher observation. Research was also carried out on teachers in larger schools which allowed for comparisons to be made between the two groups of teachers. Comparisons were also made with the findings of the ORACLE project (1979) which examined curriculum provision in British schools and with Mortimore’s (1988) research into schools within the former Inner London Educational Authority.
One of the findings of the PRISM project (Galton and Patrick, 1990) was that there was little difference between the breadth of curriculum coverage in small schools, where multi-class teaching generally occurs, and in large ones. This did not surprise the authors of the PRISM report since teachers irrespective of the size of school in which they worked were trained in similar institutions. Authors such as Bell and Sigsworth (1987) and Webb (1993) believe that while large schools may have the capacity to create subject specialists to nourish curriculum development, this potential is rarely exploited. In contrast, teachers in small schools, conscious of official perceptions, may go 'out of their way' to ensure pupils have access to the whole range of subjects. Bell and Sigsworth (1987) instanced innovative practices in small schools where parental and community involvement enriched the curriculum.

With the introduction of the National Curriculum in Britain in 1988, there were renewed fears that small schools would not be able to deliver a broad curriculum, Audit Commission (1990), DES (1991), Alexander et al (1992). These fears proved unwarranted according to Vulliamy and Webb (1995). They examined the implementation of the curriculum in small (0-100 pupils), medium (101-300 pupils) and large schools and concluded “the introduction of the National Curriculum does not, as yet, appear to have created more problems for small school than for larger ones in terms of the breadth of curriculum provision”. A number of reasons were put forward. Small schools have the opportunity for innovative curriculum and classroom organisation patterns because of more flexible staffing schedules. Depending on the local educational authority, many schools are allocated part-time teaching hours which have allowed schools provide for greater depth in the visual arts, drama, science and music. Many local educational authorities provide curriculum advisors or small school support advisors which have facilitated specific classroom planning to assist multi-class teachers in preparing two, three or four year cycles of classroom material. Other authorities facilitate the establishment of school clustering. Galton et al (1998) were more critical, concluding that teachers of small schools had not changed their practice sufficiently in line with the National Curriculum guidelines but they doubted whether practice had changed in suburban and urban classrooms either!

In relation to continuity and progression of curriculum, teachers in small schools were said to have a much clearer idea of what progress pupils made since they were working with pupils over a longer period, thereby eliminating time taken by teachers in larger schools to familiarise themselves with what pupils had covered in previous classes (Vulliamy and Webb, 1995). Use of graded schemes was reported by teachers as being of assistance in ensuring continuity and progression in mathematics and reading, (Galton and Patrick 1990).
Participation in Inservice

A major concern has been the 'supposed' professional isolation of teachers in small schools. Teachers in small schools have fewer colleagues within their own school with whom to exchange ideas. Researchers in the PRISM project cast doubt regarding this commonly held view. They found teachers were as likely to have attended teachers' centres and inservice as their counterparts in large schools. Teachers were as likely to have observed colleagues teaching as teachers in large schools. Patrick (1990) states “teachers in small schools are not unduly isolated or lacking in opportunities to encounter new ideas. Although it is certainly the case that they have fewer colleagues immediately at hand in school, they are by no means cut off from teachers in neighbouring schools, and they make as much use of the opportunities available to them”. Teacher isolation in her words “tended to be potential, or perceived rather than actual”. Vulliamy and Webb (1995) found no difference in the level of confidence reported by teachers in implementing the National Curriculum irrespective of the size of school in which they taught.

Clustering Arrangements

Since the mid 1980s, some local educational authorities in Britain have established ‘clusters’ to foster greater collaboration between groups of small schools. This was intended not only to prevent teacher isolation but also to promote the sharing of expertise and to improve the quality and range of curriculum provided in small schools. While there were variations in the way clusters were organised, essentially clusters were formed when teachers of a particular school came together and agreed to plan work at classroom or school level. Educational authorities provided grants to facilitate staffs coming together while some authorities appointed cluster co-ordinators who undertook the liaison between schools and the organisation of events. Clusters have also been used as a means of organising inter-school events so that pupils of the same age can meet each other. Staffs have opportunities to read and discuss curriculum documentation and to share the responsibility for writing policy statements relevant to local school needs. In some instances teachers take on the responsibility of co-ordinating a particular subject for other teachers, thereby reducing the burden of becoming familiar with various curriculum literature. Clusters have allowed teachers with a particular specialism to work in neighbouring schools on a peripatetic basis. Norwich et al (1994) illustrated how clusters assisted those involved in catering for pupils with special educational needs in rural areas.

Galton et al (1991, 1998) offered evaluations of such schemes concluding that clustering arrangements have had a very positive influence on developing collaboration between teachers involved. Where clustering arrangements were well established, teachers expressed fewer concerns about their capacity to cope with curricular
change. There are early indications that this may also be the situation in Ireland. The introduction of the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) to primary schools in Ireland in 1999 has facilitated the clustering of small schools for the purposes of curricular and organisational planning.

The Revised Primary Curriculum

The Revised Primary Curriculum was introduced to schools in September 1999. It takes into account the most up-to-date educational theory and practice and seeks to prepare children to engage with the modern world. The importance of integrated and comprehensive learning experiences is emphasised in order to enable children to acquire knowledge, concepts, skills and values that are relevant and appropriate to their present and future lives. Inherent in the curriculum is a commitment to lifelong learning, to be nurtured from the earliest years in school, in order to lay the foundation for the development of self-reliance in learning and a sense of responsibility for personal fulfilment. The breadth, flexibility and adaptability of the curriculum, allows teachers to select and choose content to meet the developmental needs of their pupils and to take into account factors such as environment, school and class organisation, socio-economic background and family and community expectations. The curriculum gives due recognition to the variety of ways in which children think and learn and encourages collaborative, individual and whole class teaching and learning depending on context and learning goals. The central role of the teacher in mediating the curriculum to the child in order to provide effective learning experiences that meet the needs of the child is at the core of the approach to the revised curriculum.

The revised curriculum is in the process of being implemented in schools at present. A five-year implementation programme has been put in place, involving the secondment of practising teachers to provide inservice to teachers in schools. The implementation process commenced with in-career development support for language teaching (English or Irish) and will conclude with in-career development support for History, Geography, Physical Education and Drama in the year 2004/2005. There is no doubt, however, that continuous support will be required for schools if curriculum development and implementation is to become an integral part of the process of teaching and learning in schools.

School Planning

The Primary Curriculum emphasises the importance of planning in order to achieve an integrated learning experience for children. Schools are, therefore, expected to plan on both a whole school and on a classroom basis, within the framework of the curriculum, to meet the needs of the pupils in the school. It is also essential for schools to have
a 'school plan', which incorporates both curriculum and organisational planning for the school (Education Act 1998).

To assist schools in developing a culture of school planning, the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) was established in 1999. The initiative is currently supported, at primary level, by a fulltime national co-ordinator, four regional co-ordinators, eighteen fulltime facilitators, and a team of part-time facilitators, all of whom are qualified primary school teachers on secondment. School Development Planning is about identifying the gaps between current reality and future vision and filling the gaps with long and short term collaborative planning focused on enhancing the learning of all pupils (DES 2000:3). In the Department of Education and Science guidelines on school planning the purpose of the 'School Plan' is stated as being "concerned with the creation of realistic targets which lead, if achieved over a period of time, to improvements in the education offered to children". It establishes priorities for action and provides a mechanism for reviewing progress. The School Plan enables the school to control the direction and pace of its own development in a professional way (DES 1999:8).

The SDPI has provided planning support to all primary schools, including schools with multi-classes. It is significant that, arising from their participation in the initiative, many small schools with multi-classes are beginning to get together in clusters to assist in the process of school development planning. Teachers are beginning to share responsibilities for developing or co-ordinating particular curricular areas with colleagues from other schools. Schools are also beginning to collaborate in relation to writing policy documents, which are appropriate to the needs of the local schools. Inter-school co-operation and collaboration are seen as positive outcomes of the SDPI in small schools in that it has helped to reduce teacher isolation in addition to enhancing the professional development of teachers.
SECTION B: CURRICULUM AND PLANNING IN MULTI-CLASSES

Findings of INTO Research

The INTO sought the views of respondents in relation to curriculum and planning matters in schools with multi-classes. In particular the following issues were considered:

a) Challenges regarding Curriculum Implementation
b) In-career Development Support
c) Planning
d) Teacher Education for Teachers in Multi-classes

Curriculum Challenges in a Multi-class Setting

The respondents cited a variety of challenges which impede the delivery of curriculum in a multi-class situation. For many, the issue of time management was problematic. Time is needed for planning the revised curriculum. Each class grouping needs to have adequate time allocated to them. This is illustrated by the following comments:

With the disparate groups it is difficult to deal with all aspects of the revised curriculum.

Time, support in the classroom and resources ...

and the revised curriculum requires a lot of support.

Teachers of junior classes were particularly concerned in relation to the allocation of adequate time for the Infants. Other teachers felt that time for the 'major' subjects such as English, Irish and maths was being eroded by the number of extra subjects being added to the curriculum. Lack of time can prevent subjects being broadly covered and teachers were concerned that some areas of the curriculum may not be covered at all.

A further challenge for teachers was the need to be au fait with all aspects of the curriculum and then to prioritise. Some felt that lack of resources and space can prevent the effective delivery of the curriculum. As one teacher stated:

...the biggest challenge to me would be the space in our room...We don't have the space. Even for the pre-reading stuff...where do you put the children? There just isn't the space on the floor...

The problem is that we have a lack of space due to the huge numbers we have. So this militates against the implementation of the curriculum from day one.

Several of the respondents cited the need for a small class size in order to facilitate the
implementation of the curriculum in a multi-class situation. It was considered that the emphasis on oral work could be implemented more effectively with smaller classes. It was suggested that the numbers needed to be less than 24 in order that the teacher could implement all areas of the curriculum.

The need to have an extensive repertoire of resources to prevent repetition for children who may have spent up to four years in the classroom also presented a challenge. Teachers in multi-class rooms have to deal with each class and within each class to deal with the variety of ability. Most respondents felt that extra resources would be needed in order to aid the implementation of the revised curriculum – such as resources for pupils and teachers and further access to the learning support system. It was believed that each child should have daily contact with the learning support teacher. As stated by one principal teacher:

*We have a shared learning support system ... only two mornings a week... we would need her every day ... otherwise it is just a waste of effort.*

The view was also expressed that a classroom assistant would be a valuable resource in a multi-class especially when implementing the Visual Arts curriculum. An essential resource for the teacher was seen to be the provision of inservice relevant to the multi-class teacher. It was stated that a valuable inservice programme would provide the teacher with strategies for employing and developing aspects of the curriculum across all classes.

**The Curriculum Implementation Support Programme**

There was a general consensus among the respondents that the in-career development programme for the implementation of the revised curriculum did not give adequate attention to implementation matters in multi-class settings. It was stated that no guidance or advice was available in relation to teaching of a particular subject in a multi-class setting. As some teachers stated:

*There was no guidance or advice given as to how you would actually teach a subject. We all know how to teach in a single class but that changes automatically in multi-class.*

*Every course is designed to suit one-class situations. I would like a course with just teachers from multi-class schools.*

Several respondents suggested that it would be helpful if the tutors had experience in multi-class teaching. Specialist training is needed in management skills and teachers need guidance in how to teach the various curricular areas in multi-classes. It was suggested that schools should be clustered together according to size and situation and
that teachers from schools with multi-classes should not be included with teachers from single class schools.

It was also suggested that the curriculum books should be divided into single classes as the reality of the different combinations in multi-classes do not necessarily agree with the suggested divisions in the curriculum books, i.e. some teachers may be teaching 2nd and 3rd classes rather than 1st and 2nd or 3rd and 4th which is how the curriculum books are organised. Teachers in multi-class situations need special inservice which would address their particular problems and issues.

**School Planning**

It is perhaps not surprising that schools with multi-classes find it difficult to allocate time for planning. An additional burden felt by teachers in multi-classes was the fact that they had to plan curriculum for more than one class.

*Getting the opportunity to do it is a big problem.*

*I suppose the fact a child is going to be with you for four years – that really you will need a four year plan.*

*Well you have to decide whether you’re going to group classes together. You might do a 4th class book this year and a 3rd class book next year, alternating them every second year.*

Respondents welcomed opportunities to engage in planning and meeting with their colleagues:

*When you have time out from the kids and you are looking at the school and reviewing what is happening and it’s great. I really think those days [planning days] are great.*

*I think on a planning day, small schools can interact. They can swap ideas. They can simply get to know their colleagues.*

There was a great welcome among respondents for the developing practice of clustering schools together for school planning and inservice days. It was considered “absolutely” and “definitely” a good idea as is evident from the following sample of comments:

*Everybody has the same problems and I was delighted to see in recent times that it’s (school development planning) being organised that way.*

*I would imagine that in recent times – speaking personally – people have become more professional and will work together, and certainly I would see good sense in combining schools for that purpose.*
You learn a great lot of ideas from other schools. You find teachers who are very good in some areas, and who'll give you a lot of guidance.

Some schools have become pro-active in relation to organising clusters to participate in planning as schools begin to see the value of inter-school collaboration – a practice which is promoted by the School Development Planning Initiative.

Ever since the Curriculum training started for the new curriculum, I organise a cluster of schools – about five schools together – and it more than halves the work for each school.

Absolutely. Because we are a two-teacher school, at our in-school days, we have worked with another two-teacher school. So we have that from the beginning ourselves and seen the value of doing that.

School Development training day is coming up for us, and that's bringing small groups together. We're hoping that, out of that, a support group will grow and evolve – that we can evolve these policies for ourselves, with one another, with co-operation.

Some respondents were not totally convinced of the value of inter-school collaborative planning and may have some reservations about its relevance, as indicated by the following comments:

I suppose inservice training within cluster groups is good and then you go off and do your plan. As you do get ideas. I think it is a good idea but not too many schools.

I'd suggest that from four teachers upwards they should be able to work on their own. For two and three teacher schools, I'd suggest they come together as a group, and maybe that there'd be a facilitator for the group.

On balance, however, teachers were of the view that collaboration and co-operation with other schools with multi-classes was beneficial.

Teacher Education for Teachers in Multi-classes

The INTO sought the views of teachers in multi-classes regarding their preservice education as a preparation for teaching in multi-classes and in relation to opportunities for professional development relevant to their role as teachers in multi-class settings. The following is a collation of the views expressed by respondents.

There was widespread dissatisfaction among the respondents regarding the preservice they received and the current inservice from the curriculum support unit. All teachers felt that inservice provision is geared towards single classes. Many of the trainers had no experience of teaching in multi-class situations and had very little to offer multigrade teachers. This is evident from the following comments:
I never had any training in a multi-class situation.

What we as teachers need are strategies for employing and developing aspects of the revised curriculum across four classes.

The Colleges of Education appear to ignore small schools and the problems associated with them according to many of the teachers in the survey. Teachers would welcome inservice on classroom management, school organisation and time management. Many of the respondents suggested that smaller schools should be clustered together for inservice where teachers would be encouraged to share examples of good practice regarding multi-class teaching. For example:

*I am involved in an Education Centre, and we try to cluster small schools together where possible, so you really learn a lot from each other.*

Teachers felt that what was needed was inservice which addressed the particular curricular problems experienced by multi-class teachers. It was felt that teachers coming from a background of single class teaching into a multi-class situation were at an extreme disadvantage. The appointment of mentors was thought of as a very worthwhile idea which could solve many of the initial problems faced by young teachers or teachers entering a multi-class for the first time. As stated by one teacher:

*The role of a mentor in classroom management techniques would be invaluable. If we are to hold on to our young teachers and not lose them to other professions, we’ve got to smooth entry into the profession for them.*

A classroom assistant was seen as a vital support in multi-class situations, as commented by one principal teacher.

*If we had extra personnel available to take groups and give the teacher time to be with other groups, that would be a major step ahead.*

**Concluding Comments**

It is evident from the respondents that implementation of curriculum in multi-class situations is problematic in many cases. There are mixed views, however, on whether the revised curriculum will ease or add to the burden of teachers in relation to curriculum implementation in multi-class situations. Nevertheless, there is a consensus that smaller class size is an essential requirement. The benefits of having smaller classes in order to better meet the learning needs of all pupils in the class were identified by those respondents who had experienced such a situation.

There are also challenges in relation to designing a curriculum implementation process that meets the needs of teachers in multi-class situations. Respondents were
generally of the view that their needs were not being met by the current implementation process. Suggestions included the grouping together of teachers in multi-classes for in-career development purposes and the inclusion of curriculum tutors with experience of teaching in multi-class situations.

It is quite clear that there is a consensus among respondents that their preservice education did not prepare them adequately for the challenges of teaching in a multi-class situation. Respondents, however, are equally critical of the current in-career development opportunities available to them – particularly in relation to meeting their needs as practitioners in multi-class settings. These are particular challenges in the context that in-career development opportunities are increasingly being made available to teachers regarding curriculum implementation. If the current model of curriculum support and inservice is to be successful in multi-class situations it would appear that those involved in the design and delivery of same need to be aware of the needs of teachers in multi-class settings.
Classroom Organisation

SECTION A: LITERATURE REVIEW

It is difficult to encapsulate the organisational practice to be found in Irish primary schools. One illuminating study is Complexities of Teaching: Child-Centred Perspectives (Sugrue, 1997). A number of teachers were observed in the classroom and their teaching styles analysed. Follow-up studies were carried out on five teachers. Of the five, one taught a typical multi-class, pseudonym Orla.

It is apparent from reading Orla's accounts that a high level of formal organisation characterised her teaching. Routines were established regarding class activities such as the presentation of written exercises and the examination of tables. Classroom rules were negotiated yet pupils were left in no doubt as to what was tolerable behaviour. Standards of work to be reached during the year were set early on. Smooth and quiet transitions from one activity to another were insisted upon. The operation of teaching appeared to be highly efficient and streamlined, likened to a 'machine' at one stage. Sugrue sympathetically remarks "the additional burden of working with two age groups is an important contextual constraint which puts pressure on Orla's use of time so that routine must be established for maximum efficiency". The same level of routine and formality is not evident in the accounts of the other teachers who taught in single-grade settings.

Is such a snapshot representative of teaching in multigrade classes? It is difficult to assess. The highly structured 'see-saw' approach of class groups working with the teacher before being assigned 'seat' work was evident in O'Conluain's (1991) study of one and two teacher schools in Co Monaghan. Helen Patrick (1990) involved in the PRISM project has stated "the very diversity of a class made teacher's life more difficult". In response teachers have to adopt organisational routines so as to maximize teaching.

Surmising from the PRISM project, it appears that teaching methods adopted in a multi-class are influenced by the number of standards or grades within the class. Where teachers are responsible for two or three standards, teachers combine group and individual teaching for the teaching of mathematics and English while whole-class
teaching is adopted for religion, social and environmental studies, music, art, physical education and oral language activities. Grouping is organised mostly on the basis of age and ability, as opposed to gender or pupils selecting their own groups. Rather than working collaboratively, group work involves pupils doing individual work seated together.

Where teachers are responsible for a wider range of class standards, there is greater evidence of teaching of groups and individual teacher-pupil sessions. Pupils are afforded greater opportunities to work independently of the teacher following what Hayes (1999) describes as “a heavy initial input of teacher explanation”. Certainly, the concept of the ‘integrated day’ whereby children work on disparate tasks in different areas of the curriculum does not appear to be evident. Instead, teachers cope with the variety of age and abilities by assigning different tasks within one or two subject areas.

Yet there is no single approach adopted by multi-class teachers in deciding between whole-class, group or individual teaching. It depends on circumstances. Where teachers display flexibility in approach, they are said to stand the best chance of ‘establishing the confidence of children and raising standards of work’ (HMI First Schools Survey, 1982).

Multi-class teaching requires more planning and preparation on a daily basis in order to keep groups ‘busy’ while teacher attends to other groups. Additional planning is required in particular subject areas such as religion, social and environmental studies so as to ensure that pupils are not exposed to the same topics each year. This, in many instances, requires the ‘complex’ preparation of four-year cycles of material. While authors of the PRISM (UK) report were critical as to the level of ‘rationale’ planning pursued by teachers, McGarvey et al. (1997) in their examination of planning for differentiation in a sample of Northern Ireland primary schools admitted that teachers with composite age classes experienced a ‘heavier workload’.

By way of compensation, teachers of multi-classes generally have responsibility for fewer pupils. According to the Department of Education and Science (1999/2000), the average class size in schools in Ireland with less than 50 pupils is 16. The figure for schools with between 50 and 99 pupils is 22. The average class size in schools with between 200 and 299 pupils is 26, rising to 27 in schools with between 300 and 499 pupils. A smaller class size facilitates a greater level of pupil-teacher interaction. According to the findings of the PRISM project much of this has to do with providing pupils with instructions. There is slightly less pupil-pupil interaction observed in multigrade classes yet when it occurs, it tends to be on- rather than off-task.

The Government’s Green Paper Education for a Changing World (1992) recognised the challenge multigrade teaching presented when it stated, “teachers require an exceptional degree of skill to successfully organise the learning of children whose differences in age may range from three to eight years”. Whatever the demands, Patrick (1990) in her UK study, found that “most teachers accepted [multi-class teaching] as
part of the job and as an inevitable concomitant of life in a small school”. One teacher summed it up by stating “you soon adapt to this and you realise that different groups of children have got different needs and you provide for them in the classroom and you soon realise it’s quite possible to do”. Teachers manage classroom organisation quite successfully since the PRISM (UK) project found that pupils were kept on task and routine activities 86% of teaching time in multi-classes as compared to an average 71% recorded in surveys on teaching generally.

**Grouping and Teaching Strategies in the Context of Learning in Multi-class Settings**

Grouping is most effectively used as an organisational strategy which helps the teacher cater for the wide range of ability that is inherent in combination and multigrade classes. There is considerable difference in the way children learn in a whole class situation in comparison to the way in which they learn in small groups. When the teacher is part of the discussion as s/he is when working with the whole class s/he knows exactly where the talk has touched. However no matter how skilled a teacher is at facilitating discussion among all its group members, some children will be able to opt out in larger groups. This suggests that children need an opportunity to work in different types of group settings in order to develop their learning. During groupwork children can talk about concepts with their peers and those slightly older than themselves while each child is working at understanding the new idea in an active way. For younger children in particular – who use language as a means of thinking – the opportunity to talk during groupwork is essential. To discuss a problem in a group setting enables children to give a step by step explanation of their thoughts and students benefit from hearing ideas explained at their own level. Studies have indicated that children who work together on mathematical tasks that involve both talking and using higher order skills showed higher than average gains on tests involving word problems (Cohen et al. 1989:75-94). There are many types of grouping strategies that are likely to be found in multigrade classrooms – some of which are outlined below.

**Collaborative Groupwork**

Groupwork is an effective strategy for allowing children to achieve a variety of intellectual goals and higher order thinking skills. Working collaboratively is a suitable setting for development of sorting, classifying, hypothesising, predicting, deciding, reasoning, and recording, skills which form the basis of the junior infant mathematical programme (Lewis, 1996:17). Groupwork enables children to communicate and cooperate with a range of others with different backgrounds, personalities and attitudes. For many young children who are accustomed to dominating discussion, learning to
listen to another's point of view is a skill worth learning well.

**Pair work**

The peer tutoring approach is one of the essential strategies of teaching in combination and multigrade classes and its successful use can be one of the key variables to achievement in these situations (King et al. 1996: 33). Effective peer tutoring means that both the tutor and the tutee gain increased competence in a curricular area. The techniques of peer tutoring which include prompting and demonstrating can be taught even to young children with much success.

Another type of pair work where older children teach younger classmates is mentoring. Mentoring leads to a context of interdependence, which often spills over into the playground, and is seen as one of the most positive characteristics of combination and multigrade classes (Miller, 1991:7).

**Small Flexible Heterogeneous Groups**

In some multi-age classrooms small flexible heterogeneous groups are regular features of classroom life. The quality of groupwork in this instance is affected by two major factors, namely, task design and training of the group members. The task needs to be one which promotes co-operation, have a strong cognitive demand and produce a co-operative rather than an individual outcome. Research has shown that the group process becomes more effective if the children undergo some training in working together. According to Bennett, the amount of task related talk almost doubled among 5 year olds after training was given to them (Bennett, 1994: 63).

**Ability groups**

Ability groups are a means of instructing pupils by ability so as to reduce their heterogeneity. Although the organisation of ability groups is an effective use of teacher time where s/he can pitch the level of material at an appropriate level, it also has been shown that young children in particular do not benefit from overuse of this method.

**Multi-age Groups**

The multi-age classroom is an alternative way of combining several grades in one classroom where a group of mixed age children stay with the same teacher for several years and follow an integrated curriculum rather than individual programmes for each year. A number of key factors ensure the success of a multi-age approach. These include cross age learning, mentoring, flexible interest grouping and independent
work (Stone, 1995: 102). In such classrooms, teachers receive specific training in relation to materials that can be used in multi-age classrooms, suggestions for classroom layout and grouping children as well as specific guidance on curriculum development, classroom management and individualisation of instruction.

**Independent Work**

There are many times in the combination and multigrade class when children will be required to work independently of the teacher. The difficulty of setting independent work for young children in particular stems from their inability to read and write as it is usually written work which forms the basis of independent learning. Teachers do testify however that children can concentrate for long periods of time on tasks of their own choice. The procedure for helping young children to become effective independent workers begins with encouraging them in a process of self-evaluation and by gradually increasing the amount of independent work that is set (Edwards et al. 1994: 104). It must be accepted that it is not possible for teachers to do all the direct teaching in combination and multi-classes. Instead they need to concentrate on the kinds of teaching strategies that will bring maximum benefit with limited teacher time.

**SECTION B: ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICE IN MULTI-CLASSES**

**Findings of INTO Research**

The INTO sought to ascertain the practice among teachers in multi-classes regarding school and classroom organisation. Respondents were questioned in relation to:

a) Organisational Difficulties encountered by teachers in multi-classes
b) Classroom structure and Group Organisation
c) Workload
d) Discipline in Multi-class Situations
e) The use of Information and Communication Technology

**Organisational Difficulties encountered by Teachers in Multi-classes**

Most of the respondents agreed that co-ordination of activities in order that other classes are occupied, while the teacher gives specific attention to a class group, is a constant challenge. It is necessary to have plenty of work for each group and the teacher needs to be prepared. Particular preparation is needed in September in order
to 'train' a new class to fit into the system, which is in place in the classroom.

Some of the teachers find that the teaching may be textbook driven and governed by the attitudes and expectations of the parents, who expect all the textbooks to be 'covered'. Specific subjects such as Maths and English can be difficult to organise and the textbooks are not geared to multi-classes. Maths is especially difficult as it is necessary to deal with a number of different programmes. Every topic must be covered and it is not possible to skip a section. Constant changing and juggling of groups is challenging and if the teacher also happens to be the principal this militates against smooth organisation in the classroom, due to interruptions. Time organisation and space for Infant classes pose additional problems for the teacher of the junior classes. While teaching one class the other class/classes must be working. It is difficult to design suitable work and suitable teaching methods so that both classes are still fully supervised and receiving a quality learning experience. The difficulties of such time organisation are evident in the following comments:

*The timetable is a nightmare! It is difficult to give adequate time to each subject and to balance the time given to the different classes.*

*I find it is difficult to find adequate work for one class while dealing with the other (class), and incompatible class groupings (e.g. 4th and 5th) provide organisational headaches for me".*

**Classroom Structure and Group Organisation**

Most of the respondents use a combination of group teaching, and whole class teaching. Many use the class divisions to group the pupils. Whole class teaching is used for Oral Irish and English, Religion, Music, Art, History and Geography. As stated by one teacher:

*For the most part it would be group teaching, but you would have all-in-one sessions for things like music and some art situations as well ... in maths it's very fractured because the groups are so disparate. You have to have four programmes really.*

Some also grouped the children according to ability using workgroups to develop understanding of a particular concept. Others used the older pupils as mentors for the younger children. Older children help the younger ones in maths and shared reading. Children are trained in the classroom system and learn to work independently without the need for instruction. Respondents were of the view that the work which is set must be well prepared to avoid constant interruption/disruption of the teaching and that children with special needs must be treated individually.
Workload

Multi-class teachers have a greater workload and have higher stress levels than single-class teachers, according to the respondents. Extra stress is caused by the need to structure programmes, juggle time and work and the need for preparation of material. Although the problems in multi-classes are not totally different from those encountered in single classes, they are magnified. The workload is also increased in proportion to the numbers in the classes and the variation in age groups and mental ability. This is evident in the following comment:

It's probably more stressful, more difficult situation to work in. I think we have extra stresses because of the huge variations in age and ability - combined with huge numbers, I have 25 children in four and a half classes this year!

The teacher is often teaching and talking all day which is a strain on the vocal chords. There may also be more corrections due to the fact that the groups that are not being taught at a particular period are usually engaged with written work. Teachers in multi-classes need to be familiar with more of the curriculum – up to four different curriculum statements for each subject – depending on which group of classes is being taught. Despite the extra workload and preparation the programme is often not as thoroughly covered as is possible in a single class. Despite the advantage of the older children helping the younger children the workload is still greater for teachers in multi-classes, according to the respondents. If the numbers were smaller the workload would be considered more manageable.

 Discipline in Multi-class Situations

It is important to establish class rules and ensure that the pupils are reminded of them regularly. Work creates its own discipline so it is essential to keep the pupils engaged and to engender independence. Noise levels need to be maintained at a level which allows work to continue uninterrupted. The challenge is to nip potential problems in the bud. Meeting parents at the beginning of the year to explain the class rules and teacher expectations can lessen discipline problems. The importance of rules and routine is illustrated in the following comment from a teacher in a rural school:

We have the classroom rules and I talk to them maybe once a week – say the little ones, that they need to be reminded over and over again of rules, but as they get older, say in first class, they'd remember better. You have to make allowances for the junior ones.

Whole class teaching can also help create discipline, as there is more teacher contact. Common procedures include the employment of a report card system and withdrawal of privileges as a sanction. Some respondents felt that the discipline problems
are not as great in smaller schools. Initially, infants need to learn to be disciplined as they are not as free as they would be in a single class situation. Rules need to be established early in the year and repeated regularly for the infants. The particular difficulty of disciplining in a multi-class situation usually relates to the difference in the ages of the pupils. For example:

*You can have problems between the different groups... in relating to each other ... because the age difference from the youngest in 3rd to the oldest in 6th can be huge.*

However, in general, the challenges are not very different from single grade classes.

**The Use of ICT in Multi-classes**

The INTO sought to ascertain the extent to which Information and Communication technologies were used in multi-classes. The following is a collation of the views of the respondents.

All of the teachers interviewed had some experience of using IT in their classrooms. Many experienced difficulties of an organisational nature and requested that more in-service be provided in this area on a school based model. As commented by one teacher:

*From my own observations many teachers do not have enough in-service training in classroom management especially with regard to the integration of IT*

The training given in pre-service education on IT was said by many respondents to be highly inadequate. The vast majority of teachers felt that IT could be very helpful in multi-class situations if sufficient resources were provided and if classes were smaller.

*It is very difficult to use IT with one computer in the classroom and 33 children.*

*The numbers problem has to be tackled for ICT to be successful.*

The resources available to schools, it was felt, should be in the form of technical support, hardware and classroom management courses on IT. The provision of a classroom assistant to all multi-classes is seen as very necessary to help with IT. Technical problems were also seen as one of the main problems facing teachers. Many believed that all teachers should have a home computer so that they could up-skill and evaluate software for their particular classes. Regarding software, respondents felt that the availability of a comprehensive list of CD-ROMs that have been evaluated by serving teachers would be very useful. Some teachers were of the view that all classrooms should have Internet access.

A small number of teachers regarded the computer as a negative influence in the classroom and called for the introduction of specialist teachers to integrate IT across the curriculum. The main problem they feel is that discipline can be more difficult in
multi-class situations and because of this the computer can be an added distraction.

In summary, in order for IT to become fully integrated into teaching in multi-class settings teachers require:

a) More classroom computers.
b) Technical support at the end of a phone.
c) Classroom assistants particularly in junior classes.
d) Comprehensive lists of evaluated software.
e) Classroom management courses for multi-class teaching and the integration of ICT.

**Concluding Comments**

Teachers in multi-class settings are of the view that their workload is greater than that of their colleagues in single-class settings. They find classroom management and planning for groups – both within and across class groups – a major organisational challenge. Discipline does not appear to be a major problem, as teachers structure and organise their classes to minimise disruption. However, maintaining a well organised and structured classroom is a constant challenge. Smaller numbers in multi-classes would assist in reducing the stress involved in organising and planning for more than one class at a time as would the provision of classroom assistants.

Teachers of multi-classes require ongoing upskilling in a variety of areas including classroom management, time management, constructivist approaches to teaching and IT software evaluation. A mentoring programme needs to be introduced for teachers new to multi-classes. Colleges of Education also need to be more aware of the problems faced by teachers in multi-classes. Inservice programmes need to develop modules that reflect the reality of teaching in a multi-class environment if they are to meet the needs of teachers in these settings. Small schools should be clustered for inservice courses and an atmosphere of co-operation and empathy should be encouraged. A networking programme needs to be established between schools of similar size, to facilitate communication, co-operation and collaborative working. The internet could be used to aid this process.
The philosophies of how young children learn provide a clear rationale for teaching and how materials are used with infant pupils — especially Junior Infant pupils — in the combination or multi-class. According to Jean Piaget the child is not passive in response to new experiences but rather actively tries to get meaning from them. Construction materials for example are particularly appropriate for active learning as children can manipulate materials and fit together varying shapes and colours. Furthermore, there is no right or wrong way to construct with these materials allowing children to be as creative as possible. Imitation is an important part of the active learning process for the junior infant where s/he will deepen awareness and knowledge of experiences by experimenting with them over and over again in different ways. Children benefit enormously from the presence of older children in the class to enrich their experiences and this makes a powerful argument for mixing age-groups during class playtimes.

The important and central role that social interaction plays in learning has been proposed and researched most especially by Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky believed that children are able to perform at a higher level when offered help than if left to struggle on their own. In attempting to explain this process Vygotsky developed the notion of the “Zone of Proximal Development”. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the gap between what a child can do when a teacher or more accomplished peer scaffolds a child’s learning as opposed to what a child can do when left to his/her own devices. The practice of ‘shared reading’ where an older child helps a younger child to read books that s/he would not be able to manage on his/her own is a practice of ‘scaffolding’ which regularly takes place in the combination and multi-class. The success of the process depends primarily on the difficulty level of the material being read. The books need to be challenging but not beyond the capability of the reader. The scaffolding then involves the older children enabling the younger children to practise reading skills. The more competent readers help with the words they cannot
read and ask comprehension and prediction questions to help them become more successful readers (Slavin et al. 1994:145).

Motivation has a key part to play in the learning process as there is a strong connection between self initiated active involvement and the quality of learning. Self-directed learning is facilitated by appropriate organisation of resources. Resources will need to be clearly visible and accessible to all children. This kind of organisation is particularly important in combination and multi-classes where teachers will be involved with other groups when junior infants are engaged in independent activities. Independent learning will also influence the type of resources that are available in classrooms. Resources need to reflect a wide range of interests and should be appropriate for both boys and girls. Children with special needs also need to be catered for in considering the types of resources that are available (Fisher, 1996:67).

It is clear if we are to understand anything about the ways in which young children learn we must acknowledge the central role of play in that learning. The strongest case for play in the classroom emerges when the links between the process of play and the development of cognitive skills are explored. Play activities involve exploration, practice, repetition, mastery and revision – all of which form part of developing and expanding cognitive structures (Moyle, 1989:12).

All types of play provide powerful contexts in which children learn and extend their skills in language and communication. In order to develop linguistically, children need opportunities for meaningful exchange where they can clarify new words and concepts, to practise their skills and to develop linguistic awareness. Water and sand are resources which can provide opportunities to develop and extend vocabulary whereas card games provide opportunities to interact with others.

Piaget's (1951) symbolic play is a phase in pretend or fantasy play that children go through between the ages of two and six. In this type of play the child gives an action or object some significance other than its everyday significance. This practice of making one thing stand for another is an important pre-requisite of learning in a world where the ways in which we describe and make sense of our experiences are largely symbolic. A feature of symbolic play to be considered in early childhood is the development of dramatic and socio-dramatic play (Wood et al. 1996:144). Through dramatic and socio-dramatic play children learn to create a plot, assign roles, reason out cause and effect, negotiate with others, accommodate another's perspective and practise dialogue. Teachers can actually improve the quality of play by organising the environment into learning centres e.g. home corner or dress-up corner and by the choice of materials provided there. As play provides the junior infant with opportunity for development in a whole range of areas it cannot be ignored as a process for learning. There is no doubt, however, that making appropriate provision for play in combination and multi-classes presents with a particular challenge which must be considered.
Resources and Teaching Strategies used in Multigrade Classes with Infants

Research carried out by O'Driscoll (1999) in primary schools in Ireland where junior infant pupils (four and five year olds) were in consecutive or multi-class settings sought to:

• to ascertain time spent on and the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies including whole class instruction, ability and mixed group instruction, paired and independent work.
• to examine the levels and types of resource provision available to teachers of junior infants in combination and multigrade classes.

Both issues were examined in relation to literacy and mathematical development. A brief summary of the relevant findings is provided here.

SUPPORT STAFF

O'Driscoll's research has shown that access to support personnel in schools with multi-classes is inadequate. Only 62% of schools had access to a learning support/remedial teaching service even though it is State policy since 1999 that all schools should have access to remedial/learning support teachers. Only 6% had access to a special needs resource teaching service. Whereas 17% of schools had a classroom assistant, they were not exclusively available to the infant classroom. In many cases, the classroom assistant's specific function was to provide assistance to pupils with special needs. This level of access to support teaching personnel is a cause for concern as lack of professional contact with support staff can add to feelings of isolation felt by teachers in multi-classes. It is also extremely difficult in a busy multi-class to give adequate time to teaching pupils with special learning needs. There were more than 26 children in 29% of the multigrade classes surveyed which included infant pupils.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Classrooms in general were well equipped in terms of basic mathematical and literacy equipment. Reading corners were set up in 68% of classrooms. Larger items such as sand trays and water trays or materials for socio-dramatic play – playhouse, puppets, dress-up clothes – were not as frequently available as schools rarely had adequate space to facilitate easy access to such equipment. According to O'Driscoll's findings, it is the type of material that requires little in the way of teacher time and intervention or that causes least noise or disruption to other classes in the room that will be more frequently used in multi-class settings. This was in order to keep infant pupils 'constructively occupied' while the teacher taught other groups in the classroom. However, it is interesting that a computer was available in 81% of classrooms.
TEACHING STRATEGIES

A variety of teaching strategies were used by teachers in classrooms with infant pupils. Whole class instruction where the teacher instructed all of the children as one group was employed by 72% of teachers for up to a quarter of the school day. This was the most frequently used teaching strategy which may indicate that teachers feel confined by curriculum demands to complete certain areas of work within the school year. Ability group instruction and mixed group instruction were used almost to the same degree throughout the school day – an important approach to teaching infant pupils where learning must be pitched at their level and where interaction with other children is also critical to their learning. Class group and ability group instruction were most commonly used by teachers in mathematics. Class group instruction – rather than independent or paired work – was the most popular teaching strategy used and considered by the teachers to be the most effective, in developing literacy skills and language.

Conclusion

The findings of O'Driscoll suggest that teachers of infants in multi-class settings could be better supported. Classroom design would need to be considered in relation to facilitating easy access to large items of equipment which are essential to early literacy and mathematical development. The support of classroom assistants could also be of benefit in assisting teachers to supervise activities while the teacher is actively engaged in teaching other groups in the classroom. Access to professional support services – such as learning support/remedial teachers or resource teachers for special needs also need to be improved if schools are to be in a position to provide early intervention programmes for pupils with special needs or learning difficulties.
SECTION B: CHALLENGES FOR INFANT TEACHING IN MULTIGRADE SETTINGS

Findings of INTO Research

There is no doubt that particular challenges exist when infant classes are taught in the same classroom as older pupils, particularly in relation to implementing activity and play based experiences of learning as advocated by the primary school curriculum. Views of respondents were sought in relation to coping with these particular challenges.

Respondents recognised the particular challenges of teaching infant classes in multi-class situations.

From what I have observed down through the years, I would certainly think that teaching multi-class Infants must be a hectic job.

Teaching multi-classes at the lower end of the school – it’s extremely demanding.

Respondents expressed a concern that infant pupils may not be receiving an appropriate education due to constraints presented in multi-class settings:

I really feel that the infants are suffering. Because, if you are teaching the other classes you are really saying to the infants to sit down and be quiet or you are giving them a lot of writing activities very early on.

I don’t think I’m delivering a proper service to my infants: because I have to teach first and second, I haven’t the time to spend with them, developing their language skills and whatever.

It is very difficult to give them the individual attention they require. And when you are giving them individual attention, you are very conscious of the fact that the first class is being neglected at all times. So you’re being pulled in all directions.

It is probably not surprising that classroom management issues presented the greatest challenge as it was difficult for teachers to organise developmentally appropriate activities for infants which would free the teacher to teach the older children. This is evident in the following comments:

I haven’t the time to supervise because I have to teach first and second class while the infants are working on recording. I basically end up having to send home a letter from me to their parents that they do that properly at home.

Any infants given written work to do takes them about 30 seconds to two minutes, and when you’re trying to teach another group, it’s very difficult to keep the younger ones occupied.
You need to spend an awful lot of time with infants, and I just haven’t the time to spend with them or the space.

The challenge of facilitating learning through play was also acknowledged by respondents:

It’s very difficult to organise your play. It’s doable, because I’ve done it.

You need even more [space] for the junior classes, because they need space for play.

The infants aren’t having the activities they should have. I’m thinking of construction blocks and stuff like that.

On the other hand some teachers are of the view that infants may benefit from being in the same room as older pupils as they are more likely to be socialised more quickly and to learn from the experiences of the older children. For example:

When your infants are in with an older class they can learn quite a lot more.

At times it’s a help having a 1st class in when the new infants come in, because they look after them and they train them into the ways of the classroom.

I do give them a chance in the morning [for activities] when they come in, and you have the other classes joining in then, which is nice because it helps in discussion.

In order to facilitate an appropriate early childhood education curriculum respondents made recommendations in relation to class size for infants and the provision of support from classroom assistants:

To keep the classes as small as possible and to provide classroom assistants and ancillary support at the younger stage would certainly benefit infant teachers more.

Infant teachers in a multi-class situation should automatically get a classroom assistant.

Concluding Comments

Providing appropriate learning experiences for infant pupils in multi-class settings present particular challenges to teachers. Not all infant classrooms are adequately resourced in terms of materials and equipment. However, the greater challenge lies with classroom management issues, where teachers struggle to provide play based learning experiences for junior and senior infants in classrooms where they must also teach older pupils. Teachers appear to be particularly concerned about the amount of time they have for language development and pre-reading activities. There is a strong view that in addition to having smaller classes, the provision of classroom assistants who could assist in the supervision of particular activities would enhance the learning experiences of infant pupils in multi-class settings.
SECTION A: LITERATURE REVIEW

Integration in educational terms refers, in general, to arrangements and practices to facilitate the education of children with disabilities in regular and in special classes in mainstream schools. Originally termed integration or mainstreaming the policy of placing children with special needs in regular classes is now more popularly referred to as ‘inclusion’.

Inclusion has become one of the more contentious issues in the field of education today (Banerji and Dailey, 1995; Barton, 1995; Brucker, 1995). Some writers argue that inclusion should be regarded as a ‘right’ of all children with special educational needs (Kirkaldy, 1990; Oliver, 1996). Others warn that widespread adoption of inclusive models will lead to a deterioration in the education provided for many children with special educational needs and that regular class placement may not necessarily constitute the best learning environment for some children (Kaufmann and Hallahan, 1995; Welton, 1989; Smelker, Rasch and Yudewitz, 1994). For this reason, it is often argued that the full range of placement options, including special schools and special classes should be retained, allowing for responsible choices to be made concerning the most appropriate educational setting for each individual with a disability (Vaughn and Schumm, 1995).

Despite the continuing debate, there has been an increasing trend towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs into mainstream schools. This trend, which began in the 1970s and gained momentum in the late 1980s and early 1990s has changed dramatically the nature of special educational provision. It has also had a major impact on the role of the regular class teacher, who is now required to cater for the needs of an increasingly diverse group of students (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994; McCoy, 1995). The concept that it is the right of each and every child, if at all possible, to be educated in the regular classroom has been adopted in most developed countries. It has certainly influenced policy-making in the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and much of Europe where inclusion is now the accepted placement model for students with special needs (Ashman and Elkins, 1994; Gross and Gipps, 1987; Murray – Seegert, 1992).
Policy Development in Special Education

Policy development in the Republic of Ireland, particularly in the 1990s, has also moved towards increasing levels of inclusion. Even though special classes in mainstream schools existed since the 1960s, the signing of the EU Council of Ministers charter in 1990 by Ireland further committed the government to promoting a policy of inclusion. Since then all government education policy statements have contained a commitment to the integration or inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools (Education for a Changing World, 1992, Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC), 1993, Charting our Education Future, 1995). The recommendations of the SERC Report formed the basis of future policy in the area of educational provision for children with special needs. The Education Act 1998 further strengthens the state’s commitment to providing education for pupils with special needs in both special and mainstream schools and enshrines in legislation the rights of all children to an appropriate education.

Recent developments to support a policy of integration of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools also include:

- The establishment of a National Educational Psychological Agency (NEPS) in 1999, which will be responsible for providing a psychological service for schools. It is expected that NEPS will be fully established with a cohort of 200 psychologists by 2004.
- The extension of a remedial service to all primary schools in September, 1999.
- The development of a Special Needs Resource Teaching service to support the integration of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. There are currently in the region of 2000 full-time and full-time equivalent Special Needs Resource teachers employed by the Department of Education and Science.
- The appointment of Special Needs Assistants to support the integration of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools.
- The New Deal ‘A Plan for Educational Opportunity’ in December 1999 included £4.25 (€5.40) million for special needs co-ordination as part of the government’s wider strategy for social inclusion.
- The publication of a White Paper on Early Childhood Education Ready to Learn in December 1999 stressed the importance of early diagnosis and the identification of disability and proposed the development of comprehensive policy and provision for early special needs education.
- The decision of the Minister for Education to establish a National Council for Special Education.
- Current draft curriculum guidelines for children with general learning disabilities prepared by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).
Factors Necessary for Successful Inclusion

The INTO, in its major report on the integration of pupils with special needs in mainstream education *Accommodating Difference* (1993), supported a policy of inclusion, describing the concept as an enriching and progressive experience when planned and supported by the provision of necessary resources and services. However, the organization also warned that unplanned inclusion could be harrowing and upsetting to both pupils and teachers (INTO, 1993).

The success of inclusion depends on several factors, not least the type and severity of a pupil’s disability. The severity of general learning disabilities range from mild through moderate and severe/profound learning disability. As stated by Van Kraayenoord and Elkins, (1994:244) "students who have a learning difficulty do not form a homogeneous group. They have a wide variety of characteristics, ranging from academic difficulties to cognitive and social-emotional problems”.

The practical problems surrounding inclusion are most obvious in the case of individuals with severe and multiple disabilities, since many of these students require a high degree of physical care and management over and above their special educational needs. However, there is evidence to suggest that where schools are prepared to accept the challenge of full inclusion, it is indeed possible to provide appropriate programmes for these students (Clark, 1994; Farlow, 1996; LeRoy and Simpson, 1996).

By comparison, the inclusion of students with milder forms of disability in theory at least, presents fewer problems (Andrews and Lupart, 1993; Koop and Minchinton, 1995). Where a pupil with a physical disability is concerned the areas of special need might be very specific and include access to buildings and motor areas. Autistic children may have particular communication needs. Pupils with severe behavioural difficulties present with major challenges in the mainstream classroom, as their behaviour can be upsetting to other children. As special needs are very diverse, needs differ widely among individuals. Pupils, therefore require differing levels of individual attention from the teacher or from support personnel.

Successful inclusion will also depend on having a comprehensive system for assessment and diagnosis as early identification of special needs is crucial. A child’s early learning provides the foundation for later learning, so the sooner appropriate intervention is begun the greater the opportunity and likelihood for the child to go on and learn more complex skills and have development enhanced. Children with special needs also need to have access to additional support services and personnel including qualified classroom assistants, speech therapists, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists as their needs may require. In addition to support personnel the teacher requires additional teaching materials and resources, including Information and Communication Technology which has enormous potential to reduce or even eliminate some of the learning difficulties associated with disability. In order to provide for the individual needs of pupils with special needs class size would need to be reduced
as pupils with special needs are likely to demand more attention from the teacher. A child’s experience of inclusion in a mainstream classroom also depends on the attitudes of others in the school community to inclusion. The role of the class teacher – through their own attitudes or in influencing the attitudes of others – is therefore crucial to the process.

**Key Role of the Teacher**

It has been suggested that a key element in the effectiveness of inclusion must be the views of the personnel who have the major responsibility for implementing it – teachers (Forlin, Douglas and Hattie, 1996). Ainscow (1995) argues that it is teachers’ willingness to make things work and to find ways through difficulties that is one of the strongest forces in successful inclusion. Attempts to compel mainstream teachers who may lack confidence or who feel that they already have enough to cope with in their daily job, adopt approaches that are foreign to them has, according to Ainscow the potential for damaging the whole inclusion process.

Many teachers in Ireland have only a limited knowledge of special needs and may, therefore, be apprehensive about teaching children with special needs in the mainstream classroom. Pre-service education includes at most a short theoretical module, while opportunities for professional development in the area of special education have only begun to improve in recent years. The Diploma in Special Education which is a one year full time postgraduate course funded by the Department of Education and Science and organised by the Special Education Department in St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin, is available to teachers working in a special education setting. Unfortunately, this course is currently only available in St Patrick’s College, and places are limited to 25 per year. The Special Education Department in St Patrick’s College also organises induction courses for recently appointed resource teachers and for teachers working in units for children with severe and profound learning disabilities. Froebel College of Education and Mary Immaculate College of Education have also offered short courses in special education for practising teachers.

Teachers have identified and articulated their own priorities for successful inclusion as being the following:

- the availability of support teachers and specialist resource teachers;
- smaller classes;
- a Visiting Teacher Service;
- teacher assistants;
- teaching aids and materials;
- Inservices courses in special education;
- a Schools’ Psychological Service;
- access to information on disabling conditions;
- assistance in curriculum planning and realistic goal setting to suit the pupil with special needs (Hegarty, Pocklington and Lucas, 1981).

**Classroom and School Practices**

Research is really only just beginning to determine which school and classroom practices result in the most effective inclusion (Giangreco, 1996). However, it seems that the following factors help considerably if students with significant learning or adjustment problems are to be successfully included in the regular classrooms with appropriate access to the general curriculum:

- Strong leadership on the part of the school principal;
- The development of a whole school policy supportive of inclusion;
- The development of positive attitudes toward students with disabilities;
- A commitment on the part of all staff to work collaboratively and to share problems, responsibilities and expertise;
- The development of support networks among staff, and links with outside agencies and services;
- Adequate resourcing in terms of materials and personnel;
- Regular training and professional development for staff;
- Close liaison with parents;
- Adaptation of curriculum and teaching methods (differentiation) (Westwood, 1997).

**Support Provision in Ireland**

In Ireland, currently, there are three types of support provision for pupils with special education needs in mainstream primary schools. Traditionally, support for children with special needs in mainstream schools was provided through the establishment of special classes. In more recent years, special needs resource teachers have been appointed to provide additional teaching to integrated pupils. Special needs assistants have also been appointed to assist in meeting the care needs of pupils with disabilities. There is also a Visiting Teacher Service. Children with less severe learning difficulties are supported by remedial/learning support teachers.

**Special Needs Resource Teachers**

The first special needs resource teachers were appointed in the early 1990s to provide support for children with special needs in mainstream schools. At present, a resource teacher can be appointed to a single primary school or a cluster of schools to assist in providing an education which meets the needs and abilities of children assessed as
having disabilities. Resource teachers can also be appointed on a part-time or 'hours basis' though in many cases, such part-time arrangements are unsatisfactory (INTO, 2000). The role of the resource teacher – according to the Department of Education and Science – is to provide additional teaching support for children with special needs who have been fully integrated into mainstream schools and who need such support. In addition s/he should advise and liaise with other teachers, parents and relevant professionals in the children's interest.

**Special Needs Assistants**

Special needs assistants have been employed in special schools and in some other special education facilities for many years. In recent years, however, special needs assistants have been appointed to mainstream schools to support the work of teachers whose classes include pupils with special needs. Their duties include responsibility for pupils' care needs in addition to helping pupils individually and in groups, to cope with tasks across the entire school programme under the guidance of the class teacher.

**The Visiting Teacher Service**

The Visiting Teacher Service was established in the 1970s to support the education of pre-school and primary school children with hearing impairment. It later expanded to include pupils with visual impairment. In the early 1990s, and prior to the introduction of Special Needs Resource Teaching Service, the role of the Visiting Teacher Service was expanded to include pupils with mental and physical handicap. The Visiting Teacher Service also offers some few pupils who do not attend school, home tuition usually during school hours. The current role of the Visiting Teacher includes the following responsibilities:

- Providing accurate, up-to-date information and guidelines for parents and professionals concerning the education of pupils with certain disabilities;
- Responding authoritatively to queries from parents and professionals on issues pertaining to the education of pupils with disabilities;
- Identifying developmental and educational goals and expectations, and developing strategies for their attainment;
- Employing specialist teaching skills with their pupils, and sharing their skills with classroom teachers;
- Exploring with parents the educational options available and assisting their decision making and giving non-directional advice;
- Facilitating the smooth transition into an initial or alternative educational placement. (INTO, 2000)

The caseload of each individual visiting teacher differs according to the severity of
disability concerned, the variety of disabilities involved, the geographical location of the pupils and the frequency with which visits are expected.

**Remedial Teacher Service/ Learning Support Service**

Children with less severe learning difficulties are supported through the Remedial Teacher/Learning Support Service. This service dates back to 1963 when the first ex quota remedial teachers were appointed to teach small groups of children in Irish primary schools. Since then, the service has been gradually extended and is now available to all primary schools. There are 1531 primary teachers currently deployed as remedial/learning support teachers. The term learning support is increasingly being used to denote remedial education (Government of Ireland, Learning Support Guidelines, 2000). At present, a remedial/learning support teacher can be appointed to a single primary school or a cluster of schools. Traditionally, remedial/learning support teachers were appointed to supplement the efforts of the class teacher by providing more intensive tuition to pupils whose attainments in basic literacy and/or numeracy skills were very significantly below expectation. However, the past three decades have witnessed significant change and development in the role of the remedial/learning support teacher. In addition to the provision of supplementary teaching the Department of Education Learning Support Guidelines (2000) also emphasised the value of the learning support teacher being involved in interaction with the principal teacher(s), class teachers and parents in the development and implementation of whole-school policies for the prevention and remediation of learning difficulties. In addition, the role demands linkages with psychological and other child support services. The remedial/learning support teacher also has a consultative role in the areas of pupil referral to, and placement in special educational services, acquisition of teaching and learning resources, programme planning for individual pupils and groups, and the development of school policies for less able pupils, including those with specific or general learning disabilities.

**Conclusion**

Inclusion can only be effective if governments, schools and teachers modify policies, practices and attitudes. Effective inclusion requires the development of a number of key features. A flexible and co-ordinated organisation of classes and deployment of teachers is essential. Teachers must be supported in their professional environment and work with a range of services which form an essential part of the lives of these students. There is a need to provide courses on special education at all levels of teacher training including pre-service and post – graduate levels.

Despite the very real and sometimes overwhelming difficulties faced by schools and
teachers as a result of under-funding and professional unrest, there are encouraging signs of change and reform which, if successful, could have a significant impact not only on children with special needs but on all children.

SECTION B: SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN MULTI-CLASSES

Findings of INTO Research

In order to ascertain the views of teachers in multi-classes regarding their experience of teaching children with special needs, the following issues were considered in the INTO research:
- Supports and Resources
- Teaching Strategies

Support and Resources

Most of the interviewees agreed that extra personnel would be needed to support children with special needs. It was considered necessary that pupils who attend learning support classes should have daily access to this service. In relation to shared learning support respondents were of the view that the clusters should be reviewed and then reduced. One interviewee shared a learning support/remedial teacher with five other schools. It was suggested that learning support teachers should not be shared with more than two schools as much valuable teaching time was wasted in travelling between schools. Respondents were of the opinion that children need to have at least half an hour tuition per day. Shared learning support was seen as a skimpy token service and this was well expressed by one frustrated principal teacher:

We’re sharing with four other schools – it is only a token service really. To my mind, it’s a service so that the Minister can stand up in the Dáil and say, “Every school is covered” though we know that that’s not the situation.

There was a suggestion that the learning support teacher could spend an amount of time, maybe two months in one school in the cluster and then move on to do the same in the next. It was thought that pupils would benefit more from daily tuition for a concentrated period of time. The shared service was seen as too ‘choppy’ and timetabling created a challenge. While literacy was being supported at some level, numeracy was being ignored – a situation which needs addressing.

There was also a view that each school should have access to a special needs resource teacher daily. In addition, it was suggested that more classroom assistants should be employed. Teachers expressed frustration at the lack of psychologists to
provide assessments for children who may qualify for resource teaching hours. Private assessments were considered costly and delays were experienced with other agencies due to the small number of psychologists available and the huge demand for assessments. This resulted in children's needs being neglected while awaiting assessment. In general, it was perceived that pupils with special needs needed access to specialists. As one teacher said:

_I would like to see better and more regular liaison with outside professional support groups._

Respondents also stated that extra equipment and resources should be allocated to schools with children with special needs and that each child should have a computer. It was also considered vital that there would be a collaborative approach between class teachers and learning support and special needs resource teachers.

**Teaching Strategies**

The child with special needs often loses out in a typical day in a multi-class. When the other pupils are working, the teacher may find time to target the special needs child. Children who have a special needs assistant are somewhat advantaged. Assigned work needs to be tailored to the ability of the child. The teacher does not demand or expect as much from the child as from others. However, some teachers are of the view that dealing with a special needs child may be easier at times in a multi-class situation due to the wide range of age and ability. Special programmes on the computer could help the child towards reaching his/her potential. In some cases, other children may help when they have completed their own tasks. The special needs child often has only limited access to the class teacher. Most of the teachers interviewed were concerned about the amount of time available to dedicate to a child with special needs in a multi-class setting. As expressed by one teacher:

_In the rough and tumble of the typical teacher's day, I think the child with special needs loses out ... particularly if they don't have a special needs assistant with them, which some families are reluctant to allow. If only we had more remedial/resource teachers - well-trained, properly paid people on the ground - we could achieve a lot more._

**Concluding Comment**

It is clear that teachers in multi-classes are concerned that pupils with special needs are not having their needs met adequately in multi-classes. Respondents were critical of the system where learning support teachers and special needs resource teachers spend
a disproportionate amount of their time in travelling from school to school as a result of having too many schools in a cluster. Teachers in multi-classes would also welcome additional support from special needs assistants. On a positive note, some respondents acknowledged that the diverse ability range already present in a multi-class setting made it easier to adapt to meeting the needs of a child with special needs. There was a consensus, however, that the resources currently available to support inclusion in a multi-class setting are grossly inadequate.
School Organisation and Administration

SECTION A: LITERATURE REVIEW

Many multi-class teachers carry out the function of principal teacher. Historically, the role of teaching principal involved full teaching duties in addition to specific maintenance and bureaucratic functions. In recent times, teaching principals have been required to 'bolt-on' additional administrative and managerial responsibilities in the pursuit of providing a better quality of service to pupils and parents. These include fund-raising, legal concerns, promoting curriculum development, increased liaison with parents, community and outside agencies, among others. Researchers such as Galton and Patrick (1990) and Vulliamy and Webb (1995) report that teaching principals perceive themselves primarily as teachers, with management responsibilities coming second. This was borne out in the Irish context by Dunne’s (1994) study of teaching principals in Co Wicklow. She found that teaching was their first concern followed by 'maintenance issues.'

Coping with Role Conflict

Notwithstanding role preference, teaching principals encounter considerable role conflict. The PRISM* (UK) project found that the highest levels of distraction and interruption in classrooms were recorded in classrooms of principal teachers. The authors of the PRISM (UK) report believed that teaching principals were reluctant to exercise greater discretion in how they dealt with interruptions. The Report on the Role of the Primary School Principal (1999) reported a similar view.

The Cooper and Lybrand (1993) analysis of small schools commissioned by the British Department of Education advocated a greater level of delegation on the part of the principal teacher. In his study of six principals, five of whom were teaching principals, Fullam (1997) suggests that principals tend to overlook the positive benefits worthwhile delegation of duties can bring. It may be timely that an assessment be
carried out on the impact of Circular 6/97, which made provision for in-house management in small schools.

Wilson and McPake's (2000) study of Scottish teaching principals found they placed particular value on networks of colleagues for support and advice. In addition, principals reported that schemes that involved devolution of functions from regional and central authorities necessitated greater secretarial support at local level. This certainly echoes the INTO's demand throughout the 1990s that small schools deserve designated secretarial and care-taking support.

The Report on the Role of the Primary School Principal (1999) recognised the need for greater levels of support for principal teachers. Some of its recommendations included the provision of time release for teaching principals, the reduction in the number of pupils required for the appointment of an administrative principal, the provision of induction courses for newly appointed principals and the replacement of Circular 16/73. Such improvements would 'free' teaching principals to pursue a wider range of managerial tasks and to adopt a more pro-active approach to leadership, (Phillips, 1997).

**Instructional Leadership**

While Dunne (1994) concluded that teaching principals were reluctant to adopt the 'transformative and visionary' dimensions of management, many commentators such as Alexander et al (1992), Webb (1994), Vulliamy and Webb (1995), Galton et al (1998), have applauded their managerial strengths. As class teachers, these principals were active in curriculum development and knowledgeable about the processes involved. They were in a unique position to lead development by example, seeing themselves as 'doers' rather than producers of curriculum statements. In contrast, administrative principals had little daily contact with the classroom and lacked detailed knowledge of the curriculum.

**Teaching Principals and the Management of Change**

Wilson and McPake (2000) have explored the idea that teaching heads have developed their own style to the introduction of change. Their study based on Scotland revealed that such principals had literally little time for the traditional 'plan-implement-review' approach. Instead their approach involves a 'quick audit' of school need, realistic planning for achievable targets, involvement of others from within and outside the teaching staff in the implementation of change before 'signing-off' and moving to the next initiative or scheme. According to the authors, the practice of teaching principals reflected 'situational school management', largely determined by the context in which the school found itself rather than a situation where principals followed a particular philosophy.
SECTION B: ORGANISATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES IN SCHOOLS WITH MULTI-CLASSES

Findings of INTO Research

The INTO sought the views of teachers in multi-class settings regarding the organisation and administrative challenges pertaining to schools with multi-classes. The following issues in particular were addressed:

- School Administration
- Ancillary Staff
- Supervision
- School Building
- Allocation of Classes
- Policy Development
- Parental Involvement

School Administration

All principals of small schools are teaching principals, the majority of whom are teaching in multi-class settings. As outlined in the literature, the dual role of class teacher and school leader places additional demands on teaching principals. That this dual role at times creates conflict for teaching principals is evident in the following comment:

"It's extremely difficult, and because you're so conscious of teaching a class, and because teachers by their nature are caring people, the administration is the last thing that's done."

It is probably not surprising, therefore, that given their primary function as class teachers, most of their administrative duties are carried out outside of school hours.

I tend to work during break times and lunchtimes to get as much done during school, from nine to five. I'm in early in the mornings. I tend to leave later than everybody else in the evenings and avoid taking work home with me.

My administrative duties are mainly after school, or in the morning.

From the point of view of the day-to-day administration, I would find that I'd be in the school from nine o'clock until four, minimum.

The release days, recently negotiated by the INTO for teaching principals to enable them to carry out some of their administrative duties and to engage in educational leadership have been greatly welcomed by teaching principals, though they do not solve all their difficulties. This is evident in the following comments:
The release days are great in one way, that you actually get time in school to sit down and work things out. Having said that I think you take on extra stuff... because I have the days off I feel I'm taking on more.

I'm finding these six days a great advantage now, a big help. ... We have the same substitute teacher coming in for the days.

I do know that administrative days are a help, but there's still the day-to-day running.

It is not easy, however, for teaching principals to find substitutes when they wish to take their release days. This may in some way be related to the current teacher shortage. However, there may also be a reluctance among teachers to do substitute work in multi-class settings. For instance:

It's very difficult to find a sub. Most of them don't want a multi-class situation, and a lot of them, I find, don't want to take infants.

There would need to be a group of teachers who would take over from the principal in every area - a supply panel for every small area.

Teaching principals find it particularly difficult to cope with the level of interruptions during the school day. Interruptions usually relate to their role and function as a principal. However relevant such interruptions may be in relation to school administrative or organisational issues, principals find that such incidences can disrupt their teaching.

My difficulty as well is that I'm principal, and can be called out - so it's very difficult to get a momentum going in the class and keeping it without being disturbed.

The biggest problem is the phone, because you might be in the middle of a class, and the phone will ring.

You've less time because your teachers need more time. If you don't give them time, I think things begin to fester and you begin to have problems.

Ancillary Staff

The support of ancillary staff - namely caretakers and secretaries - is invaluable in primary schools. However, such support services have never been automatically available to schools. Many schools relied on social employment schemes for the provision of secretarial and care-taking services. Some schools have no service while others had part-time services as evident in the following comments:

We have a secretary and a caretaker, both on a part-time basis.

We share her [secretary] with another school for a number of hours.
The caretaker is on call. Rather than coming regularly to the school, he would be called to the school if there was a maintenance problem.

The value of good secretarial assistance is clearly recognised by respondents. The following are some typical examples of the views expressed:

Our secretary is basically the power behind the throne. Like all good secretaries, she keeps the place running.

If I didn’t have a secretary I really would be up the wall.

Overall, she’s [secretary] been a great help to the school since she arrived.

Supervision

As in the majority of primary schools, supervision in schools with multi-classes is generally carried out by all teachers on a rota system, though the difficulties of organising a rota in two-teacher schools was acknowledged. For example:

Yard supervision is organised on a rota. We’re paired off and the yard is supervised at all times.

It’s especially bad in small schools where there are not enough teachers to create a large enough rota.

When there are only two teachers, supervision is full-time.

Supervision within the classroom is also a challenge, in that teachers when giving attention to one class group may not be in a position to observe other class groups at all times. Having young and older children together in the same classroom also creates a challenge to ensure that the younger children are not hurt, particularly in the context that space in multigrade classrooms was rarely adequate. How teachers address such issues is demonstrated in the comments below:

A teacher needs to be very aware of the fact that for quite a proportion of the day, children will be in your care, but not necessarily under your observation.

You have to make rules … for the bigger ones that they wouldn’t be rushing around the room and knocking the smaller ones over!

One of the first things I did in my room was I took massive presses out of the way to give children more space. Less danger and more space. More space for me to move around, less danger for the children.

It is interesting that in the absence of a systemic approach to providing cover for teacher absences, it has become practice in some two-teachers schools to request parents to keep children at home on days where it would be known that the teacher
would be absent. This is particularly the case in relation to EPV days (Extra Personal Vacation). Parents were generally supportive of this approach as there were health and safety issues regarding the leaving of two classes with one teacher for a whole day. This is clear in the following statements:

[Parents] decided that they would prefer that one teacher would be there and able to teach her class rather than having one teacher there with eight classes and not being able to teach anyone. So, we just let them know when somebody is going to be missing on an EPV day and generally nobody comes in.

If I'm going to be off, sometimes I ask the parents to keep them at home, because they aren't safe in the classroom.

Allocation of Classes

Practices varied in schools regarding the allocation of classes. Teachers in the larger schools were more likely to get an opportunity to move within the school and to gain experience of teaching different class levels. The respondents were generally of the view that moving between classes was not very practical in small schools as children could end up having the same teacher for practically their whole primary school career. The importance of exposing pupils to both male and female role models was also recognised. For example:

At the moment I have the junior end. If I decided to change next year the pupils I have taught for the last four years I would be teaching them again for the next four years. So, when do you decide to change in a two-teacher school?

If I decided in the morning to move from 5th and 6th class, I would imagine there would be a backlash. Because, being the only man in the school and the only male role model that one might have in the school, if I did move at this stage, then children would go through their whole school career without ever having met a male.

For some teachers, teaching the infants, or sixth class were considered the most difficult, as illustrated in the following comment:

The Junior [infants] and senior [sixth] classes in some cases are avoided like the plague ... the perception being that those classes are more difficult.

In some cases, the opportunity of gaining experience of both junior and senior pupils is facilitated by teachers taking responsibility for one curricular area throughout the school or to ‘swap’ classes every now and again. For example:

We do share. He does PE for the whole school, and I do music for the whole school.
There are times when he’ll come down to teach my class Irish or English – just to see what it is like – and I’ll go up and see what it’s like in his room.

Policy Development

It is evident from the respondents that staff meetings do take place in small schools, though may sometimes be more informal. Policies are formed in general through a democratic process. As stated by some respondents:

When we’re drawing up a policy, we’ll sit down and discuss it between the two of us.

We have a very open system whereby when a staff meeting is called, everybody makes a submission... we’d come to a collective decision and a draft document would be drawn up.

All members of staff are involved and everyone gets an equal airing of their view.

However, the practical difficulties in small schools regarding time to meet and consult were evident in one respondent’s comment:

The policies are developed at lunchtime or at staff meetings ... at break time. We would generally try to come to some consensus.

School Building

There are many primary school buildings which are substandard – some in terms of general infrastructure and some in terms of the facilities available to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. Schools with multi-classes were no exception as shown by the following comments:

The school building itself, is very poor and decrepit. There are stairs in the school which, I think are a safety nightmare. I have a drip in my ceiling. I have poor blackboards.

Two-teacher schools by their nature are nearly always old schools. In my school I have no green area in which sports can be done. There is no principal’s office and there is no hall.

We have no PE facilities.

With the revised curriculum, we need a lot of different areas within the classroom. A lot of movement about. Our classrooms are too small. We had to bring back the old desks – our classrooms weren’t sizeable enough for the modern furniture.
Parental Involvement

There was more or less general agreement that the level of parental involvement was quite superficial. Respondents mentioned parental involvement in relation to "fundraising", "sports days", "football training sessions" and "school concerts". Respondents acknowledged, however, that parents were generally supportive but not always available to assist with school activities.

They let us get on with it and they're not directly involved. But they'd be very supportive.

We are finding it impossible to get parents to drive anywhere because they are all working. Since the celtic tiger came in that seems to be the way, before that it would have been easier.

Concluding Comments

There are particular difficulties in small schools with teaching principals in relation to school organisation and administrative issues. Time to carry out administrative responsibilities is clearly an issue though the release days have been greatly welcomed. Administrative support on a daily basis in schools would also be considered essential, in order to lessen the disruption of the principal teacher's classroom regarding daily administrative issues. It is a continuing disgrace that schools do not have access to adequate secretarial and care-taking services.

In the interests of health and safety assistance with supervision, particularly in the two-teacher schools, should be available.

It is perhaps not surprising that many respondents found their school buildings unsatisfactory. Many schools were not built to facilitate the implementation of a child centred approach to curriculum. This is a situation which needs to be rectified immediately if teachers are to be in a position to implement the revised primary curriculum as it's designed to be implemented.

It seems to be a feature of today's society, that not as many parents are as available to become involved in school activities as used to be the case. However, parents in general remain very supportive of the work of schools, and in most cases help out with activities when invited to do so.
Effects of Multi-class Settings on Pupils

SECTION A: LITERATURE REVIEW

Being a pupil in a multigrade classroom poses its own challenges. Pupils in such classrooms need to cultivate habits of responsibility for their own learning. They must also be willing to help one another to learn and they are expected to develop independence at an early age. The effective multi-class teacher establishes a climate to promote and develop this independence. Co-operation is therefore vital in a multi-class setting. Classmates consist of pupils of all ages and this familial closeness extends outwards to include the community. The philosophy that students benefit from the range and diversity possible with multigrade groupings is reflected in the work of Gaustad (1997) who argued that:

"Research indicates that heterogeneous grouping promotes cognitive and social growth, reduces anti-social behaviour, and facilitates the use of research based developmentally appropriate instructional practices such as active learning and integrated curriculum."

Gaustad’s work was supported by the findings of Feldman and Gray (1999) who stated that the benefits for pupils in such classrooms are:

- Younger children actively use older children to develop skills and to acquire knowledge.
- Mixed-age play offers unique opportunities for creativity and the practise of skills.
- Age mixing provides opportunities for children to find others of matching abilities.
- Older children actively assert responsibility for younger ones and develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of that responsibility.
Academic Achievement

A commonly posed question is whether the curriculum and organisational set-up in multi-class situations/small schools benefits or hinders pupils. Following the publication of the Investment in Education report in 1965, the then Minister for Education, Mr. George Colley proclaimed that “the attainment of pupils in smaller schools is generally two years behind the progress of pupils in larger schools”. In a similar vein, the HMI Survey of Primary Education (1978) in the UK compared the attainment of pupils in mixed-age classes and single-age classes and found there were significant differences in favour of single-age classes. It estimated that teachers generally find it too difficult to match pupil ability with tasks assigned. From interviews carried out as a part of the PRISM (UK) project, teachers are aware that in whole class or group situations instruction is generally pitched at the ‘majority age’ pupils. This would appear to adversely affect pupils outside of this group. However, criticism has been made of the research procedure adopted in the HMI Survey of Primary Education (1978). Bennett et al (1987) believed that when IQ and the parental background of pupils were taken into consideration, there was no significant difference in the attainment of pupils of mixed-age and single-age classes. Similarly, the report of the ORACLE project concluded that when teaching style is considered, progress of pupils in multigrade classes does not differ from those of single-age classes. The practice of streaming gave some pupils in large schools an advantage in the past, (Coolahan, 1990). The PRISM (UK) project concluded that pupils in small schools do as well if not better, on standardised tests of reading, language and mathematics. PRISM (UK) pupils generally performed better in English while gains made initially in mathematics were lost towards the end of primary school. Regrettably, the results of reading and mathematics attainment tests carried out in Ireland for the International Assessment and Evaluation Survey have not been analysed vis-a-vis type of class organisation or school size.

Social Development

Another common criticism is that pupils of multigrade classes lose out on the stimulation, competition and social interaction of a larger peer group which their counterparts in single-grade classes experience (HMI First School Survey, 1982). Many writers believe that the social interaction of pupils in multi-classes/small schools has been underestimated. Pupils in multi-classes may come from the same locality and so make the transition from home to school more easily. Pupils encounter fewer transitions between standards than in larger schools. There is a much greater family element to small schools and probably accounts for the absence of confrontation remarked upon by researchers. Younger and older pupils co-operate more. Bell and Sigsworth (1987) are particularly critical of the popularly held fixation with “pupils having to mix with pupils of the same age”. They pose the question whether the situation in small school
or large schools reflects society in general?

Research conducted by the University of Aberdeen indicated that pupils from small and medium schools, schools with four teachers or fewer, had less apprehension about transferring to secondary school (quoted in Bell and Sigsworth, 1987). Based on a study of 4,746 Primary 4 pupils in Wales, Francis (1992) found that pupils taught in small schools of 60 pupils or less displayed more positive attitudes to school and had a greater level of self-esteem than pupils of larger schools. Milburn (1981) made similar findings in the Canadian context. Writers such as Bell and Sigsworth (1987) and Hopkins and Ellis (1991) have mentioned how teachers in small schools know their pupils' backgrounds better and how relationships with their parents are usually based on frequent and informal contact. Achieving greater level of parent-teacher rapport is widely regarded as having beneficial effects on pupil progress.

SECTION B: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTS ON PUPILS

Findings of INTO Research

Respondents were asked to give their views on the advantages and disadvantages for pupils in multi-class settings. In general teachers were of the view that there are many advantages for the pupils, particularly in relation to the contribution that older pupils can make to the learning of the younger pupils. This is evident in the following comments:

The older children help the younger ones to read, and read with them ... It's just a natural process in a multi-class.

It can definitely have advantages ... The younger ones can be tuned in all the time. Even when they are writing, they're tuned in to what else is going on in the room. You find that when their time does come later on and they come to a particular topic in later years, they remember that they have heard this before.

There's greater flexibility. They [the pupils] meet a wider range of work and challenges. It would allow children with particular skills and talents to advance at a greater rate.

It's amazing what the junior infants pick up from the older ones. Even the classroom organisation side of it, the sitting down – they see others do it, and they want to be like the others.

Some of the disadvantages perceived by teachers relate to the circumstances which pertain in multi-classes—such as class size. Others relate to the lack of support services that are available in general to small schools. As a result teachers feel they do not have
sufficient time to give adequate attention to all pupils. This is illustrated by the following comments.

*I think the modern child has such a short concentration span that a multi-class situation cannot be as beneficial as a single-class situation. It is just basically they are not given the same amount of attention that they get in a single class situation.*

_Disadvantages would [include] the time element. The teacher is so stretched for time that the possibility of working one-to-one or in small groups with children is diminished—dramatically._

However, some of the teachers who are of the view that there are advantages for pupils in multi-class settings, believe that learning from older pupils is more likely to be of benefit to the brighter pupils in the class. For example:

_For the bright pupils, it’s that they’re getting a flavour of the coming classes._

_Also, for brighter children, they can listen in when you’re doing subjects with 5th and 6th and that stimulates and keeps them going._

_It’s mainly the brighter ones who will benefit because they’ve been listening and they’re tuned in._

The impact of the experience of being in a multi-class setting on pupils who are average or who have difficulties with learning is not as clearcut. Some respondents believe that weaker children may not benefit to the same extent as brighter pupils from their experiences in multi-class situations. This is evident from the following comments:

*I think the disadvantage is for the child who needs teacher contact time, the average or below average child.*

*I think the child with special needs [loses out]—particularly if they don’t have a special needs assistant with them._

_The weaker ones—or the less talented, let’s say,—will have problems of their own staying afloat. They don’t get as much focussed attention then._

Nevertheless, for some teachers, there are also benefits for weaker pupils or for pupils with difficulties with learning in a multi-class situation. For example:

_For a weak child, they get to hear something they haven’t grasped two or three times. Long division is a major one. If a child hasn’t got it in fourth class, they hear it again in 5th class … and they hear it in sixth class. So they get it three times over._

_Because I teach groups, Junior Infants and Senior Infants together—a child who has had problems in Junior Infants gets a chance to go back over some of what they’ve_
Em of MuMa Sem'ngs on Pupils done in Junior Infants again. For that reason it can also benefit the weaker children.

The advantages for pupils in multi-classes also include social dimensions. For example some respondents referred to the community atmosphere which is more likely to be present in a small school:

I see a lot of benefits for the children in the school. Being in a small community, being part of that small community, growing up there ... I think that community atmosphere is very nice for them. And being in that kind of community, they do learn a lot from one another, almost like an apprenticeship.

Out in the yard for example, it's much more like a big family than you have in single-class situations.

Though many respondents pointed out the benefits for younger pupils in multi-class settings, in that they learn a lot from older pupils, the situation is not without some disadvantages for both younger and older pupils. Whereas the younger pupils may have opportunities to learn from the older pupils, the older pupils don't have older people from whom they can learn – other than the teacher. On the other hand, younger pupils, particularly infant pupils are more confined when they are in the same classroom as older pupils. These points are illustrated by the following comments:

I would think if anyone loses out, it's the older ones – because you don't have as much time to give them and they don't have anyone to learn from. So I think the young ones gain more than the old ones.

The older ones would be distracted with what's going on with infants, if we're doing rhymes or stuff like that.

The disadvantages in my situation would be that the little ones are being confined. They should be having more activities – but because of the space and because the older ones have to work, I have to restrict them.

Concluding Comment

It is clear that there are both advantages and disadvantages for pupils in multi-class settings. Most of the advantages, as described by the respondents, relate to the benefits for pupils of being able to learn from each other – particularly the fact that younger children can learn from older pupils and that older pupils can help out with activities. The community atmosphere of small schools was also perceived as a benefit to pupils' social development. The greatest challenge for teachers is to ensure that they meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties or pupils who need a lot of reinforcement to learn new concepts. As mentioned in earlier chapters, teachers also find it difficult to
provide appropriate activity based learning experience for infant pupils due to the constraint of having to teach older pupils in the same room. Some of these disadvantages or difficulties are easily addressed through policy decisions to provide for smaller class numbers in multi-class settings, to allocate classroom assistants to multi-classes, particularly infant classes and to provide better access to learning support services so that the needs of children with learning difficulties can be addressed.
Conclusion

This brief review represents a range of themes and ideas connected with multi-class teaching. Much of it is dependent on British-based research due to the paucity of sources based in the Irish experience. The 'action research' approach to educational research may enhance our understanding of the difficulties, pressures, opportunities and successes multi-class teachers' experience. Among the many issues that require attention are the following:

- How do teachers cater for the wide span of age, maturity and ability within classes?
- What effect has a policy of integration of pupils with special education needs within mainstream classes have on multi-class teaching?
- To what extent do younger children learn from older children?
- What effect do constant interruptions have on the teaching and learning in the principal's classroom?
- How prevalent is the practice of teachers doing 'swap-overs' in particular subjects in small schools?
- Do multi-class teachers have access to the same level of material and physical resources as their single grade counterparts?

Research has exposed much of the rhetoric and stereotypical notions associated with the multi-class teaching. Multi-class teaching is capable of catering for a broad curriculum. It appears that multi-class teachers have to engage in a greater level of classroom preparation and planning in order to achieve this. Multi-class teaching takes place predominantly in smaller organizations and often in more isolated areas. There needs to be greater recognition on the part of policy-makers and teacher educators of its unique dynamic. This may necessitate special supports being made available to such teachers. A more creative approach to the staffing of small schools and the further development of agencies such as the School Development Planning Initiative and the Primary School Curriculum Support Programme would be beneficial in this regard.

There is no doubt that there is a need for continuous research on multi-class teaching in the Irish context. It is the hope of the Education Committee to engage in further research in this area.
Opening Addresses

Ted Motherway, Cathaoirleach, Education Committee

As Cathaoirleach of the Education Committee I'd like to welcome delegates and guests to this year's INTO Consultative Conference on Education. The function of the Education Committee is to advise the CEC on various educational matters. In fulfilling this remit the committee carries out extensive research and discussion on a number of topics. Recent topics on which the committee have advised the CEC include Profiling and Whole School Education. The committee has been working on North-South co-operation with particular emphasis on assessment, early childhood education and transfer from first level education. The committee has also begun to examine Language Teaching and Educational Under-achievement.

The two topics chosen for this years' conference - Teaching in Multi-classes and Challenges in Primary Education were chosen because of their current relevance and importance to many members. The tremendous amount of change which is taking place at the moment - new legislation, a revised curriculum and several new initiatives make the whole issue of change a topical issue. Multi-class teaching is an issue which affects many of our members yet little time is devoted to the issues surrounding it or how change impacts on teachers in multi-class situations. The format of this year's conference entails the discussion of background papers which have been prepared by the Education Committee and we would hope that your deliberations on these background paper will be beneficial to members in coping with change, and meeting the challenge posed by multigrade classrooms.

Because little or no Irish research has been carried out in the area of multi-class teaching the Education Committee decided to conduct qualitative type research on the issues arising for teachers who teach in multi-classes. This research took the form of semi-structured interviews. The outcome of those interviews are included in the background paper and, in my view, make interesting reading. It is hoped that this research will provide direction for future work in this under-researched area.

I wish you well in your deliberations and I hope that you enjoy the conference.

1. Published as a separate report
2. Appendix 1 outlines the Profile of Interview Respondents and Appendix 2 contains the Interview Questions Form
Deirbhile Nic Craith, Senior Official/Education Officer

The INTO Consultative Conference on Education is an important opportunity for members to participate in the discussion, formulation and development of INTO policy on educational issues. Our topics for this conference allow us to consider the central role of teachers in educational policy-making – a role which is quite complex.

Many of the changes in education in recent years – which are outlined in the discussion document on Change in the Primary School – have been actively sought by the INTO. At a national level, the INTO, as a key player in the field has played a highly influential role in making and shaping educational policy pertaining to primary education. Teachers, through the INTO, have actively engaged in the policy-making process in a variety of ways such as – determining the educational policy agenda, contesting policy texts, participating in policy discourse and through influencing or even controlling the policy implementation process. A prime example includes the Revised Primary Curriculum – both its design and implementation.

However, teachers are not mere recipients of policy devised by others. Teachers also influence educational policy at school and classroom level. Teachers' understanding of and reactions to policy initiatives will depend on contextual factors such as resources, conditions of work, teacher and school culture as well as individual’s own knowledge, skills and expectations. Educational policy is continuously contested and reinterpreted at the level of practice. It is part of the process of policy-making that teachers would interpret and adapt educational policies and initiatives to meet their own and their pupil’s needs within the local context of their schools and classrooms.

Teachers also bring their own meaning to policy action through professional interaction and discourse – whether at school level or through in-career development. We would hope that the INTO Education Conference would be seen as one of those opportunities for our members to engage in professional discourse on current educational issues.

Our topic today – Teaching in Multi-classes – is an example of an area of education in which very little research has been carried out in an Irish context. Indeed some teachers would argue that the fact that over 40% of pupils are in multi-classes has been ignored by the system. It appears that single-grade classes are perceived as the norm – in teacher education, in-career development, textbook production and so on. As one teacher said, “I never knew I had it so good in a single class until I moved into a multi-class”. On the other hand, one teacher in a multi-class setting stated that “she wouldn’t have it any other way”.

The concept of organising pupils in vertical or mixed age groups is a deliberate policy in some places. It certainly is the philosophy of the Montessori approach to early years and primary education. Vertical grouping is advocated on the basis that developmental age is not always in line with chronological age, that it is a more natu-
ral situation and that it caters for each individual working at his or her own particular pace. It allows for younger children to learn from older children – the older pupils providing ‘scaffolding’ for younger pupils. Who better to explain a concept to a child but another child who is a little older? The mind of a seven-year-old is much closer to the mind of the five-year-old than our minds are – as Maria Montessori argues, there is a natural “mental osmosis” between them. And the older child, in having to teach something to a younger child, has to analyse and rearrange his or her own store of knowledge, and in the process is understanding better what he or she already knows. Perhaps then all pupils should be in multi-class settings – in well resourced classrooms with small numbers of pupils and possibly a classroom assistant! That is the theory. The reality of the teaching/learning process in multi-class settings in Irish primary schools, will be presented and discussed this afternoon, and will inform future INTO policy in relation to teaching in multi-classes. It is hoped also that you will identify further areas requiring research which would be of relevance to teachers in multi-classes.

I hope, delegates, that you will benefit from the opportunity this weekend to explore the topics being presented. Whereas INTO policy is decided at Congress it is informed and shaped through discussion, debate, argument and reflection, here at the Education Conference, but also at school and branch level.

The INTO will continue to play a leading role in educational policy making. Our success will depend to a large extent on the quality of opportunity provided to members to engage in the process.

Tá súil agam go mbainfidh sibh taitneamh agus tairbhé as an gComhdháil.
Presentations

I: TEACHING IN MULTI-CLASSES – THE VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

Milo Walsh, Education Committee

As we embark upon the implementation phase of the revised primary curriculum the topic of multigrade teaching as a subject for an Education Conference is timely. The last occasion the INTO discussed this topic was in 1987. In the fourteen years since that conference many changes have occurred in primary schools. Teachers have embraced new technologies and have upskilled at an unprecedented rate. There has been an enormous increase in the number of teachers opting for courses in learning support and resource teaching. This reflects possibly the biggest change to face teachers over the last two decades – the changing profile of the children we teach. Teachers are faced with a growing number of children with emotional, social, academic and behavioural problems. It is not to suggest that children with difficulties were not always with us but they are being discovered at a greater rate. This increased detection is of course very desirable but we must ensure that the back-up supports and resources keep in pace with demands made on teachers and schools.

The Education Committee decided to carry out some research with a view to representing the experience of teachers in multigrade situations. Interviews were recorded at various centres around the country. The following conversation is an amalgam of the views expressed in these interviews.

Anne Healy and Carmel Niland, Education Committee

Carmel Anne, tell me about your classroom?

Anne I have four and half classes in my room – 25 children ranging in age from 7 to 12. There are five different class groupings to be dealt with. I worry about the time avail-
able for all the subjects. There are five maths programmes to be covered. I try to work the group together as often as possible and this works for certain art activities, for music and sometimes for history and geography. There is only so much I can do in whole class situations for Irish and English. The older classes need time to develop their skills in the languages. And space! We just don't have enough space for the activity based revised curriculum. Sometimes it's a case of where do the children fit? I need a repertoire of resources. The children will spend four years in my room and the programme needs to be varied in order to avoid boredom from repetition. What are the challenges for you, Carmel?

Carmel Time is an issue for me. I need to plan – I would love to be able to plan with someone who is in a similar situation to myself. It would be good to have one day a term when we could be clustered with other two-teacher schools in order to plan our work. Do you know that clustering of schools for School Development Planning is such a good idea. Teachers can learn so much from each other. Teaching can be a very lonely profession. On a planning day teachers from small schools can interact and swap ideas, some of which may have been well tried and tested in similar multi-class situations. The practical consideration of deliverability is the first essential factor. We must have the courage to put to paper our local interpretation of what comes from the DES e.g. a policy on bullying in a large urban school could be very different to what might work in a small rural multi-class school. In drawing up our plans we must also bear in mind the fact that a child may be with the same teacher for up to four or even five years so the plans must cater for this fact – "where you are alternating and changing a four year plan it is a lot of extra work". However, planning the timetable is a nightmare. I don't feel that the inservice days for the Revised Curriculum addressed my particular problems at all. The tutors were great and there were some marvellous ideas which would be wonderful in a single grade classroom but things change automatically in multi-class. What do you think?

Anne I think it would be helpful if the tutors had experience in multi-class teaching and also I believe that we should be clustered according to school size and situation. I would like a course with just teachers from multi-class schools. In my view teachers from schools with multi-classes should not be included with teachers from single class schools. It might also be an idea to divide the curriculum books into single classes as the divisions in multi-classes do not necessarily fit into the suggested divisions in the books. I could be teaching 2nd and 3rd classes which is not a combination suggested by the division of the curriculum books. And while on the subject of inservice, do you think your time in training college prepared you for working with multi-classes? Wouldn't it have been great to have had a mentor?
Carmel As far as training colleges are concerned it seems that multi-classes just about exist. Many young teachers graduating "shy away from country schools because they cannot deal with the multi-class situations". They just have no idea how to cope with it. A final year student worked a few administrative days for a principal recently and she was shocked when faced with the real world of multi-class. She found herself completely at sea. In relation to your question on mentoring - yes, it definitely is a very worthwhile idea and could solve many of the problems faced by young teachers entering a multi-class for the first time. "The role of a mentor in classroom management techniques would be invaluable. We've got to smooth entry into the profession for our younger teachers. I went from a single to two classes; that wasn't too bad; but when I moved from two to four classes it was a different world. Advice from an experienced teacher who had worked in such a situation would have been a great help to me at that stage". Tell me how do you organise your classroom?

Anne As I said earlier incompatible class groups like 4th and 5th are an organisational headache! There is no doubt in my mind that there are extra stresses and problems on me as a teacher of a multi-class. You know, I read somewhere recently that the children in a multigrade classroom do not suffer educationally as a consequence of being in that situation - in fact it can help them socially and educationally. But there was no doubt that the teacher does suffer extra stress in relation to the organisation of time and the effort to attend to all the children at the various levels. There is certainly a huge stress on the vocal chords - they just don't get a break! When you are moving from group to group you are constantly talking and teaching. Sometimes I use the older children as mentors for the younger ones in maths and paired reading. I find it is difficult to find adequate work for one class while dealing with the other. Maths is particularly challenging as every topic must be covered and it is not possible to skip a section. But recently, I was looking up multigrade teaching on the Internet and I came across something which made me smile. Did you know that if you teach more than one class group in Vietnam your wages are increased by 50% and if it is more than that the increase is 75%! Wouldn't that be great! It wouldn't lessen the stress but the pain might be made more bearable! The other thing is that teachers would be queuing up to teach in our small schools! Though mobility between the classes could be an issue for teachers, would you agree?

Carmel Well, moving between classes in a small school is not very practical as some children could end up having the same teacher for practically their whole primary school careers. Teaching 5th and 6th classes as a teaching principal means one can at least deal with callers and these classes can reasonably be relied upon "to get on with the work and not kill each other or break something". On the other hand some colleagues believe that the workload at senior level is too great to carry, along with
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administrative duties, and so prefer to teach junior classes. I’m aware of a four-teacher school, which has a policy of discussing class allocation at five yearly intervals, and teachers are given an opportunity to change and share subjects. On another issue – how do you create discipline?

Anne It is important to establish class rules and ensure that the pupils are reminded of them regularly. Work creates its own discipline, as it is essential to keep the pupils occupied and to engender independence. You can have problems between the different groups in relation to each other because the age difference from the youngest in 3rd to the oldest in 6th can be huge. We have classroom rules and at the beginning of the year I repeat these regularly because the youngest class needs to be reminded of them. There is an advantage in that the older classes act as role models. Actually, I think the discipline problems are not as great as in larger schools but workload is certainly a problem, what do you think?

Carmel Yes, workload is an issue. I don’t doubt that the work in a single classroom is also challenging but even with several groups within the classroom they are the same age group. There is not the huge age range and several maths programmes to be covered. The timetable is certainly more manageable in a single classroom. I agree that there is a greater workload and higher stress levels for the teacher in a multi-class situation. The stress is caused by the need to structure programmes, juggle time and work and the need to prepare extra material. The problems in multi-class are not totally different to those encountered in single classes but they are magnified. We need to be familiar with more of the curriculum. I have to be au fait with four different curriculum statements for each subject! Providing for special needs children is a particular challenge. How do you cope with that?

Anne I feel that the child often loses out in the typical day to day classroom. There are times when I feel that the special needs child can benefit from being in a classroom with such a wide range of age and ability. I certainly am concerned at the amount of time I have available to devote to the child who has special needs. Schools should have access to special needs assistants and children who attend the resource teacher should have daily access to the service. We have a shared learning support system, only two mornings a week. We would need to have this service every day. Otherwise it’s just a waste of effort. Shared learning support is a token service. To my mind it’s a service so that the Minister can stand up in the Dáil and say “Every school is covered” though we know that’s not the situation. The clusters for the shared leaning support need to be reviewed and then reduced. Maybe it would be better if the learning support teacher could spend a specific amount of time, maybe two months, in one school in the cluster and then move on to do the same in the next. If the numbers in the classes were smaller then it
would be possible to devote more time to the needs of the child. Of course size impinges on everything, doesn't it?

_Carmel_ Absolutely. I'm teaching 22 children in four different classes at present as well as doing all the principal teacher's administrative duties. Depending on the number of classes being taught there needs to be an absolute maximum class size which must not be breached. With any combination of classes the maximum should be 20 pupils. When more than three classes are being taught in a multi-class the maximum should be 15 pupils. For instance, I use a computer daily in my classroom. The problems at the level of class organisation are due both to the large numbers and the lack of hardware. I have one computer. But, it is a support. The children get a chance to reinforce concepts which they have encountered in maths or other subjects. It definitely is an advantage and a tool in our situation. There are however, particular challenges with infants. Do you agree?

_Anne_ Indeed. My colleague in the junior room has even more headaches in relation to the organisation of the infants. She would love to be able to do all the recommended activities with the juniors when they come in but she has to make sure that all the classes are dealt with so the juniors have to learn to become independent learners and to adhere to the classroom rules at a very early stage. There are some advantages for infants in a multi-class situation as, when the infants are in with an older class, they can learn quite a lot more and they are socialised more quickly by the presence of the older children. I think that a classroom assistant would be a great help in all multi-class situations but particularly in infants. You are a teaching principal – how do you cope with that?

_Carmel_ It's extremely difficult. In general my principal's duties are done outside school hours. The principal release days are a big improvement, but getting a substitute, without a supply panel in place, for these days is very difficult. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that substitutes find that teaching in multi-classes is more difficult. With the introduction of the Education Act, we have to work on the development of school policies, and very often they are developed at "morning break or lunchtime". "If I didn't have the secretary I really would be up the wall". The secretary is the "power behind the throne, like all good secretaries, she keeps the place running". Like all teaching principals I have to spend a certain amount of time outside school hours on school related tasks. Just to give you a flavour of my workload outside school hours for the past week:

On Monday after the break, the mountain of post had to be dealt with and you must realise that every circular which issues to the largest schools in the country also arrives into every small school, so it was a 5.00pm finish. On Tuesday, with my principal's hat,
my colleague and I met parents of a child in need of assessment with a view to resource input, forms had to be filled so I finished at 4.45. On Tuesday night with my IT co-ordinator’s hat, I attended a three hour course INTEL – Teach to the Future. On Wednesday night with my principal’s hat, I attended a board of management meeting in the school. On Thursday, again wearing my principal’s hat, I met a Bus Éireann official for 1.5 hours after school to go through an application for free school transport for some children. On Friday, the Pest Control person arrived to do a job on our 20 year old pre-fab, which had become infected with the annual ‘cuidteeoire’. Needless to say this had to be outside school hours. And there’s ‘Write-A-Book’ night, IPPN, a computer course on setting up a school website and so on. It’s not possible to bi-locate. I know there are advantages and disadvantages in teaching in a multi-class situation. At times I feel I am too close to the situation to see them but I know Milo has prepared a presentation on this subject so we can sit back and enjoy that!

*Milo Walsh, Education Committee*

On a personal note, the work I have being doing in this area has been a true journey of discovery as I myself have never worked in a multi-class situation. I had always felt that the multiplicity of academic abilities in any classroom reflected in some way the reality in a multi-class situation. While in some ways I feel this is a valid stance, a true multi-class experience appears to come with its own particular stresses and problems. It should also be borne in mind that multi-class is not just a rural phenomenon but is becoming an increasing aspect of the urban scene. Generally speaking it takes the form of consecutive classes in urban areas. A total of 42% of primary schools have fewer than seven teachers. During the school year 1998/99, 44% of primary teachers taught in multigrade classrooms, an increase from 37% in the school year 1983/84, when the Education Committee last studied this topic. I would like to highlight the positive and negative aspects of multigrade teaching and to help stimulate discussions in your groups.

**Some Negative Features**

- Multigrade classes are far too large. A recent publication by the INTO *Literacy in the Primary School* quotes research that stresses the need for the identification and remediation of learning difficulties at the earliest opportunity in the primary school. Large classes hinder the realisation of this goal especially in multi-classes. Time pres-
sure figured very prominently in our surveys. The number of children in the class, in addition to the breadth of the curriculum to be taught, creates pressure for teachers.

- Classroom design is also a particular problem in multigrade classes. Large classes in small areas do not facilitate the implementation of activities and group work as desirable. The lack of storage space is particularly troublesome.

- The lack of resources is, of course, a universal problem in the Irish primary school system. However, in multi-class situations an adequate supply of supplementary reading materials, manipulative equipment and self-correcting items are vital. Apart altogether from financial considerations a particular problem facing teachers is a lack of knowledge on what is available and the lack of time to explore what is available in terms of resources.

- Planning for multigrade classes places extra demands on teachers in terms of textbooks, materials, curriculum delivery, grouping and meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.

- In addition to different ability levels – which occur in all classrooms – large differences in age and interest levels occur in multigrade classrooms.

**Some Positive Features**

- In small schools pupils can have a considerable advantage over their counterparts in a large urban setting. The class groupings are generally smaller and children can adjust more easily to school and class conventions. In many cases such smaller groups can constitute a natural extension of the family, and, in some cases, other members of the family may be in the same class. A very important aspect of the small rural multigrade class is that it has a gender mix which is viewed as the norm. These aspects, in turn, can lead to healthier social relationships, a sense of belonging and mirrors society in general.

- As the teacher is generally with a child for more than one year a greater knowledge and understanding of the child is possible. The child is exposed to a variety of teaching methodologies, learns how to learn independently at an early stage and generally has a low instance of absenteeism.

**‘Cool for Kids – Tough on Teachers’**

The rich tapestry of invention that primary school teachers (both single and multigrade) bring to their teaching – snapshots of which were captured in our document on literacy and numeracy in the primary school – should leave none in doubt as to the commitment of Irish teachers to the pupils in their care. This creative and resourceful talent responsible for the positive features of the multigrade classroom should not go unacknowledged. This richness and inventiveness is often at the cost to the individual
teacher who on a daily basis combats the negative aspects I have outlined. This, of course, leads to increased stress. Teachers were never trained for a multi-class situation – they had to learn strategies to cater for the problems they encountered. The extra work in planning and classroom organisation increases the level of stress felt. Feelings of helplessness and of inadequacy and of being overrun by circumstances as one tries to struggle, juggle and complete programmes of work, while universal to all teachers, appear to be the ‘classroom persistent’ of the multi-class teacher. One of the features of the revised curriculum is to use the knowledge that children have, to build on and connect with, in order to bring them to a higher plain. This requires flexibility, imagination, and a lot of energy – which primary teachers are supplying – but the danger is one of professional burnout. Many teachers constantly feel they work in an unsupported environment. In the case of small rural schools, teachers, perhaps, suffer from a degree of professional isolation.

Embracing Change

Particular challenges face young graduates who are experiencing a multi-class situation for the first time. However, it is also a challenge for teachers who have spent years in a single class to experience multi-class teaching for the first time. The needs of these particular teachers are not currently addressed in the system. In the case of inservice, small schools need to be grouped together and not with larger schools in order to make up numbers! We need to move to a more focused and directed inservice programme where the needs of teachers in multigrade situations are highlighted and dealt with. Further support and guidance would need to be offered to teachers – particularly to teachers new to multigrade classrooms – in relation to suitable methodologies, classroom organisation and use of textbooks.

2 MULTI-CLASS V SINGLE CLASS – REFLECTIONS ON A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Frank Coen, Annagh BNS, Co Galway

After qualifying in St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, I taught in the primary school there for ten years during which time I taught a range of single classes from senior infants to sixth. My first class consisted of 52 senior infants in 1970. I finished my last year there teaching sixth class, by which time numbers had fallen to somewhere in the early thirties as far as I can recollect. There were 27 teachers in the school at that point which included a remedial post and a special class teacher. In 1980 I moved to Galway
to teach in a 2 teacher boys' school where I have been since. I teach third to sixth standards and as an extra punishment, I am also the principal teacher. On taking up this post I expected a massive change in my working conditions and certainly wasn’t disappointed in that regard.

The most striking difference that was immediately evident was my professional isolation as a teacher. I had, heretofore, the benefit of several colleagues with whom to exchange ideas and discuss strategies for curriculum delivery. We had three streams of each class so often things were planned together. This enriched our work. We were also affirmed by each other in our work which is something we all need occasionally. By contrast in a smaller school there was little contact with fellow professionals which was a great disadvantage for the teacher. However, this situation has improved with the emergence of support groups which bring about much more contact between small schools than was the case up to now. This, in my opinion, is a very welcome and positive change.

Teaching four classes was a huge change for me, and I quickly learned that my underlying philosophy for classroom management had to be to keep all groups busy at all costs. This required watertight organisation and a lot of planning to avoid repeating topics from year to year especially in subjects like English and environmental studies. As the years have passed, the necessity to entertain children with very short concentration spans adds to the demands. A certain amount of class teaching might be followed up by group work and peer tutoring. This is especially helpful in maths where four separate syllabi have to be taught. In a multi-class there is the advantage for pupils who find difficulty with an area that they hear it repeated in subsequent years. I also try to have the same area being taught simultaneously in middle classes, and also the same area being taught the same week in senior classes. This gives an opportunity to pupils who had difficulty the previous year to master the topic. This is a definite advantage to a multi-class pupil over a single class pupil.

Time management is crucial in a multi-class and if there is someone who needs extra attention – as there often is – you end up stressed trying to catch up for the rest of the day. The great advantage I see with single classes in this situation, is that there is only one curriculum to follow despite the fact that there will be varied abilities. And I acknowledge that numbers are always too high.

Younger pupils in a multi-class benefit a lot from listening in to the older classes. The more able pupils in particular are stimulated and research topics they overhear in a more senior class. Very few topics are completely new and this is a decided advantage over a single class in my view. I feel that there is a more gradual development of learning in a multi-class and it is easier for children to work at their own pace. The onus of large numbers makes this more difficult in a single class.

Curriculum planning for teachers in multi-classes poses a particularly heavy workload. They must have a broad overview of all the curricula for their respective classes and then select and prioritise. It disappoints me to find that the needs of multi-class situ-
ations are not addressed in the revised curriculum, nor are any guidelines given to assist the teacher in planning. The problem of curriculum overload also means that the core subjects will get priority at the expense of visual arts, PE and music. Those subjects themselves present particular difficulties in trying to choose topics that are achievable for the lower age group while at the same time challenging the more senior pupils.

In the area of special needs small schools are generally sharing a learning support or special needs resource teacher. This dictates that a disproportionate amount of time is spent by the teacher in travelling between schools thus losing out on valuable teaching time. In my own case the learning support teacher is shared between 4 schools of varying sizes with a distance of 12 miles between the schools at the opposite ends of the parish. In a single class situation the support teacher is usually based in the school which is a plus, but numbers for the service will be much greater. So it is difficult to know who has the best deal there.

In discipline matters the same problems are encountered in multi and single classes. However, the wide range of age groups, ability and maturity can present its own problems. Sometimes if there are disruptive children in senior classes they can have a very negative effect on the younger children, often spoiling childhood innocence in the process.

Social development is well nurtured in small schools despite lacking the social interaction of a larger peer group found in a single class. Everyone is part of a community in a smaller school and this enables young children to make the transition from home to school with greater ease. Often in the playground there is great social interaction between the age groups with older pupils taking on a custodian role for younger children. This is all very positive for social development.

The introduction of ICT is a tremendous resource for multi-class teaching as very often the computers are in the classroom and children work in pairs or larger groups. More training needs to be provided on the integration of ICT into the curriculum. A list of reviewed software for different subjects would also be useful. Technical support in the form of a systems manager who would come to the school to carry out repairs also needs to be provided. This would be of great assistance to single and multi-class teachers. However, the computer can sometimes be a distraction as noise may prove too intrusive. This is especially true in junior classes where infants often persist in looking back to computers when other classes are working on them.

One of the major disadvantages of multi-classes in my experience is that children may have the same teacher for three or four years. This may be fine unless there is a personality clash between teacher and pupil which makes life for both more stressful. If I had a choice of multi-class I think a 4 teacher school would be the ideal arrangement as it would provide a fairly natural division. It would also give the pupils access to 4 different teachers during their primary school years. I see it as a major plus for the children in single classes to have access to a good number of teachers during their primary education.
In conclusion, I reiterate again that due recognition must be given to multi-class teaching by the Department with regard to delivery of the new curriculum. Strategies must be put in place to assist teachers of multi-classes. This has not been the case in any of the inservice days to date. I believe that schools of similar size should be clustered for inservice with a facilitator who has worked in a multi-class. Pre-service teacher education should also take cognisance of multi-class teaching and provide young teachers with the skills to work in a multi-class situation.

3 SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Seán Balfe, Regional Co-ordinator, School Development Planning Support (SDPS – Primary)

School development planning is a strategy for implementing change and improvement in a systematic but manageable way. Establishing clear priorities for development on the basis of both the school’s own unique context and the wider national agenda enables schools to maintain an appropriate degree of manageability and control. The need to base the school’s planning agenda firmly on the learning needs of the pupils was emphasised.

Schools with 1-6 class teachers generally work in clusters for school development planning days. The SDPS facilitator makes a ‘pre-planning’ visit to each school to identify the particular priorities that school may wish to address. At the beginning of the planning day itself, the whole group brainstorms around each school’s issues. In this way, the experience of everyone in the group is available to every school in the group. Participants then break into smaller planning groups and focus on particular topics. These groups may be made up of each school’s own staff working as a single unit or may include representatives from each of the schools present. Before the end of the day, the whole group reassembles and, if they choose, they share the work they have done during the day. In this way every school has had the benefit of input from colleagues in addressing their own priorities and, in addition, they can take away an outline of other topics which can be adapted to suit each school’s individual circumstances. Follow up visits to schools by facilitators can provide additional support with these or other topics.

Feedback from teachers has been extremely positive. Many have commented on the benefits of working with colleagues who are familiar with the realities of working in a multi-class situation.

4. See Appendix 3 for Slide Presentation
4 PRIMARY CURRICULUM SUPPORT PROGRAMME (PCSP)

Joan Crowley O'Sullivan and Tom Colgan, Assistant Co-Ordinators 5

When the Lord created the universe he pronounced it very good, not perfect. This revised curriculum is also very good but perhaps not perfect. I wish to look at areas within the revised curriculum that may have positive advantages in a multigrade situation.

In English, for example, the use of the novel frees the teacher from using class textbooks. The story The Sheep Pig by Dick King Smith can be done with pupils between the ages of 8 and 10. This frees the class teacher from doing 2 or 3 class texts. The emphasis on oral comprehension in this curriculum is also helpful as children listen to questions and answers to which they would normally be exposed.

Getting children to work in pairs, and in small groups is actively encouraged in the revised curriculum. In the multigrade situation groups can be exposed to a range of experience beyond the curriculum limits of their class group. This leads to active learning and peer tutorage where children develop co-operation and negotiation skills. Here multigrade is an advantage because of the experiences, knowledge and skills that children share with one another.

Joan Gaustad in her 1997 study found that: "younger children actively use older children to develop skills and to acquire knowledge, mixed play offers opportunities for creativity and the practice of skills and older children actively assert responsibility for younger ones and develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of that responsibility". Life is a mixed ability situation; so multigrade is a preparation for life.

Multi-classes are not particular to the Irish situation. Arising from 56 studies from 12 countries, Simon Veenan (1995) found that there was no empirical evidence for the assumption that student learning may suffer in multigrade and multi-age classrooms. I think multigrade teachers need to hear that and that they are doing a wonderful job and this needs to be acknowledged. There is no doubt, however, that work overload and teacher stress are negative dimensions of teaching in a multigrade situation.

Each school is unique, even within the multigrade situation. A two teacher school will have specific needs that are different to a four teacher school. The PCSP, therefore offers, differentiated support to meet the needs of schools with multi-classes.

5. See Appendix 3 for Slide Presentation
Collated Rapporteur Reports

"Research indicates that heterogeneous grouping promotes cognitive and social growth, reduces anti-social behaviour, and facilitates the use of research-based developmentally appropriate instructional practices such as active learning and integrated curriculum. The wider range of ages and abilities in a multi-age classroom discourages misleading age-graded expectations and helps teachers focus on students' individual learning needs". Gaustad (1997)

Consider the advantages and disadvantages for pupils in a multi-class situation in light of the above quote

It was stated that multi-grouping can encourage negative behaviour as well as positive. It was suggested that a mentoring system would work – "the bright child helping the slow children". A shared reading programme was identified as a positive action. A principal teacher in a small rural school on the outskirts of a town painted a bleak and difficult picture of the situation in her school – sixty-six children including Travellers, two children on Ritalin, children with physical disabilities, special needs children, learning disabilities and others with challenging behaviour. It was agreed that social breakdown is now also impacting on the small school. The group recommended that the Montessori method of grouping 3-6, 6-9 and 9-12 year olds, be explored as a resource for primary education.

The research literature on multigrade teaching is unanimous on at least one of its conclusions. For children to learn effectively in multigrade environments, teachers need to be well organised, well resourced and well trained, as well as holding positive attitudes to multigrade teaching. Discuss this conclusion in relation to the current reality in multi-classes in Irish schools.

The group welcomed the INTO research on multi-class and hoped that this research would continue and that the issue of multi-class will be kept to the fore in the organization. In relation to training it was stated that "nobody is well-trained" in multi-class
methodologies and the example of the Church of Ireland was cited as these schools are mostly multi-class, but there is no special training in their pre-service education. The majority of the group believed that, at inservice, facilitators were not effective in meeting the needs of teachers in multi-class and that the Department of Education and Science had failed teachers in multi-class. One tutor in a group said that all the issues mentioned were valid and reflect the difficulties of young teachers going into small schools. She proposed that multi-class should be cross curricular. It was noted that the broad range of abilities in a single class does not equal the varying abilities in the multi-class.

The following strategies were recommended:
- Have homework on the table, the teacher sees and dates it.
- Corrections should be done every day.
- Plan a day ahead so that children can continue without help.
- Combine written and oral work.
- Maths, perceived as a “balancing act”, one participant from a one-teacher school said in her school the 6th class help and supervise the infants while she teaches the middle classes.
- Have a busy folder containing work for children to do when they are finished.
- The group recommend that a day would be set aside for specific multi-class inservice for the implementation of the revised curriculum.

Teachers, according to the INTO research, have been critical of their own pre-service education and of the teacher education of young graduates in relation to preparation for teaching in multi-class-settings. How justified is this criticism and what recommendations should the INTO be making in relation to:
- teacher education programmes,
- teacher induction, and
- continuous Professional development in terms of meeting the needs of teachers in multi-class settings.

The general feeling was that pre-service education was not adequate. It was stated that it was not possible to prepare everyone in three years for all the different roles. Colleges of Education need to address the problems of multi-class teaching. Younger teachers in the group confirmed that their preservice education did not include multi-class training. One teacher who had forty-two children in her first teaching post remembered an inspector saying to her “it takes seven years to be a teacher.” Another commented, “I learned more in my first year of teaching than in all my time at college”, and this teacher recommended the inclusion of a mentoring aspect in all teacher training. Some of the other comments on preservice from the group were:
It does not equip us for teaching in multi-classes.

Multi-classes are something to be avoided.

You simply train yourself.

You have to use your own common sense and get on with it.

It would have been great to have someone to advise you.

There should be courses to help you to deal with multi-classes.

Most people feel ill prepared after the three years. They come out with theory and go into difficult situations and become cynical about theory. One teacher asked the inspector for advice. He posted out the syllabus for the three classes. The inspectorate is inadequate in this area. Inspectors also need to be trained in the area of helping teachers with strategies in multi-class teaching.

Almost half of the group have had experience teaching in multi-class settings and the following were the recommendations of the group on this question:

- Teaching multi-classes should be part of preservice training with an extra module on multi-class teaching or include one year of teaching experience as a "sandwich" course.
- Teaching multi-classes should be part of the induction service whereby a newly qualified teacher has a partnership with a teacher of multi-classes.
- INTO should put in place a mentoring service for student/new teachers going into multi-class settings. And also organize a cluster system providing teachers with an opportunity to meet and exchange good practice. School cluster groups should include same size schools only.
- Summer courses should be abolished and all inservice training should be during the school year with class teachers delivering the courses.
- A better information system should exist between HEI's and schools to know what is expected of schools as students gain all teaching experiences from the school.
- The B.Ed should be changed to two years of study with one year of paid teaching practice and ending with one final year of study.
- Teachers in multi-class settings should develop coping strategies e.g.
  (a) Extra sourcing for textbooks/computers etc.
  (b) Use of IT prepared worksheets.
  (c) Setting up self-teach/corrective programmes.

Principal teachers in multi-class settings have particular difficulties in that they are usually teaching principals. At times there appears to be a conflict between their roles as class teachers and the carrying out of their administrative and leadership
duties. How can principals in such situations be better supported? In terms of school leadership what are the advantages of being a teaching principal?

The question of availability of ‘subs’ for principal release days was explored and the following recommendations were made:

- A supply panel be drawn up in each area.
- Retired teachers should be given an incentive to take up substitute work.
- A group of principals would work together on their release days e.g. work on DES circulars.

The Department circular on release days was discussed and questioned, the implication for principals who have to get permission from the board of management and then submit a report on how the day was spent. One group felt that the INTO has made some inroads into the problem and that this work must be continued.

One of the greatest challenges for teachers in multi-class settings is providing for appropriate play and activity based learning experiences for infant pupils. What conditions would make it possible for teachers in multi-class settings to implement the primary curriculum as intended for infant pupils?

It was agreed that free play is not possible in multi-class settings as the noise level is too high and the rooms are generally too small. The teacher must structure the play and monitor the experiences of the children. In order to implement the revised curriculum in the infant multi-classroom more space is essential. Sometimes four or five children in an infant grouping is more easily managed than bigger groupings of 4-5 year olds. Self-corrective resources need to be provided so that the teacher can set up an activity and the children could progress through it.

The value of classroom assistants was discussed especially in the area of infant education in the multi-class setting. Trained classroom assistants are essential for effective provision of curriculum implementation as intended for infant pupils – arrangements could then be made for some activity learning to take place outside ‘small’ classrooms. There was unanimous approval for the suggestion that there should be an agreed course and qualification for classroom assistants.

The issue of timetabling is very important. The teacher needs to choose an optimal time for activity/play/learning. Teachers should not have to be too concerned about materials that get lost or broken. The teaching learning process is the most important issue. Grants for infant education should be issued to schools on an annual basis.

In relation to infants staying on in school for full school day to accommodate local bus timetabling arrangements it was agreed that all children do have the entitlement to be in school for the full school day but boards of management have the authority to
make rulings at local level. The group felt that a unilateral approach to this matter is necessary to avoid unfavourable comparisons between schools.

It is argued by teachers in multi-class settings, particularly by teachers in small schools, that the support provided by the learning support/remedial teachers and special needs resource teachers is inadequate on the basis that they are often only available to a school two or three days a week as they are shared between a number of schools. Class teachers would be of the view that children with learning difficulties need regular access and more intensive support than what's being provided at the moment. How can the current approach to learning support and/or special needs support be enhanced for pupils in multi-class settings?

The group acknowledged that all primary schools now have access to learning support. This progress is recognized and appreciated. The INTO needs to continue to keep this issue in the public forum in order to improve the level of provision for smaller schools. The group was of the opinion that the learning support and resource service as it applies in many schools is only a token service and needs considerable upgrading and investment. There are difficulties in relation to the spread of the provision as well as problems in relation to accommodation. One teacher spoke of her school's learning support teacher having to work in a cloakroom. The level of learning support and/or resource teacher provision though little, is very helpful – but it can be disruptive. It means that whole class groupings are only available to class teachers for two hours on days when provision is available to individual schools. Some class teachers would prefer to take children for support teaching while the learning support teacher would take the whole class.

Learning support time allocation for smaller schools must be increased. Having one learning support teacher servicing six schools is unacceptable. The fact that infant classes are generally not a priority for learning support teachers must be addressed.

There were calls for a Department commitment to outline minimum standards of provision and a wide variance was reported on the support or otherwise of different inspectors. Contributors expressed the views that local co-ordination among schools clusters was very important, as was the co-operation between learning support teachers and class teacher. The value of keeping records was emphasized, as these were often needed long after the child had moved on from the school. The question of training for learning support teachers was discussed and it was agreed that there should be easier access to training courses.

It was suggested that the learning support/remedial teacher should spend time in one school for two months and in the other school for two months. It would be up to the schools themselves to organize this. It would be preferable for a school in a cluster
to get an intensive provision, (5 day week) rather than just two visits a week.

There is no learning support available for some ‘average’ groupings within multi-class settings, therefore trained classroom assistants would be very helpful for some children. Because special needs children take up so much time in multi-classes the whole class is often disrupted by one or two pupils and the group were seriously concerned about this issue. Fulltime fully trained special needs assistants are essential for effective inclusive integration of children with special needs. Children with special needs should have a greater weighting. Schools need clarification in relation to the enrolment of children with special needs. Some teachers in the group felt that there are benefits which can be derived from inclusive integration of children with special needs for mainstream pupils. They also stated that every necessary back up/resource (including a fulltime quality special needs assistant) must be in place if teachers are to survive and if all pupils are to benefit. It was unanimously agreed that class size in multi-class situations should not be greater than 20:1.

Are there particular teaching methodologies that are more appropriate for teaching in multi-class settings? What are the best pedagogical practices in multi-class settings? Is ICT a help or a hindrance in multi-class settings?

It was agreed that there was a need to make a distinction between teaching a mix of two classes and teaching more than two. The group felt that it is virtually impossible to provide for special needs when teaching four classes in one room. The teacher has to juggle a lot of balls in the air to be able to manage in a multi-class situation. Everything had to be well planned and totally structured so that things happened almost by rote. The organization of space can be a problem, although one teacher suggested that the teacher’s chair could be removed because she never gets to sit on it!

ICT can be a big help – depending on the number of computers available – e.g. one class can be occupied on the computer(s).

It helps if the remedial teacher can take a whole class at a time – as opposed to taking one or two pupils from the group.

Collaboration is important. An example given was a school that had a UK trained teacher who didn’t have Gaeilge. Another teacher took her class for Gaeilge whilst she took the teacher’s class for a different subject/area of the curriculum. It was pointed out that there is very little scope for collaboration in a 2-teacher school. If classes 1 and 2 are combined, then it can be a help when the juniors go home. There was a lengthy discussion on this point, as many schools feel that they are obliged to hold on to the juniors, if it doesn’t suit the parents to collect them early. It was suggested that the CEC should issue clear advice on this issue, or that there should be a motion on the topic to Congress.
It was also suggested that the INTO should set up a 'diktat list' on the website so that teachers in multi-class situations could liaise with each other on areas of common interest.

Publishing companies should produce textbooks/workbooks that cover at least a two-year span. It was felt that publishing companies were not interested in dealing with 2 teacher schools and that INTO could pursue this issue.

Difficulties can be encountered when e.g. the 6th class is being prepared for Confirmation and the younger pupils, who are not ready for such, are 'absorbing' the content of the programme. A separate, but valid point that was discussed in the group was the manner in which 'splitting' of classes can be a problem. Most parents want their children to be combined with the older group in such a situation. It was agreed that parents see the 'textbook as the curriculum' and that they need to have their awareness raised about how pupils are working at different levels.

It was concluded that multi-classes give a great opportunity for reinforcement of learning.
Participant Evaluation

General

This conference was described by respondents as well organised, enjoyable, and informative with excellent discussion topics. Acknowledging the role of the multi-class teacher and the recognition of small schools was commended by participants.

Respondents were impressed with the excellent interaction/sharing of ideas and problems between delegates. They also said that they looked forward to the publication of proceedings following the conference. Many expressed their disappointment about the lack of an organised social event for delegates.

Several respondents stated that every INTO member should attend at least one Education Conference. Some said that it was more beneficial than Congress but fewer were entitled to attend. This should not be the case.

It should be noted that there seems to be confusion among respondents as to what they should gain from this conference. Many want solutions, concrete ideas for good practice to bring back to their classroom as opposed to identifying problems and shaping policy. The purpose of the Consultative Conference on Education needs to be clarified among members.

Conference Venue

CONFERENCE ROOMS

Overall, participants stated that they were very satisfied with the rooms used to host the conference, however many stated that having four discussion groups in the main hall all at once was unsatisfactory since people could not hear within their groups. It was suggested that each discussion group be allocated to a separate room at future conferences.

ACCOMMODATION

For those who stayed in the hotel during the conference they were extremely satisfied with their accommodation. It was suggested that as a matter of course a list of local accommodation e.g. B&Bs be included in delegates’ packs.
CATERING
Participants were satisfied with the tea/coffee supplied but many stated that sandwiches should be available on arrival (Friday, 1.30pm) since the conference did not conclude until 7pm that evening. It was stated that many participants had travelled long distances and had not had time to take lunch in the hotel or elsewhere.

Interaction/Participation

DISCUSSION GROUPS
Participants were delighted to be allocated to discussion groups as requested. Those participants who sent back their nomination forms later than requested and were not allocated to their first choice discussion group were disappointed. It was agreed that smaller, task oriented discussion groups (better led) were preferable, where members could interact and debate among each other for a longer period of time. Many participants stated that the time spent in discussion groups was more beneficial than listening to speeches etc. since members can interact better and clarify points made. Suggestions for improvement included changing/mixing up discussion groups on the second day; ensuring that the discussion document questions were used as the agenda for discussion groups; rapporteurs should put questions or suggestions to the panel immediately following discussion group sessions.

SPEAKERS
Daithi Ryder, Carmel Niland and Anne Healy’s presentations were described as excellent. Many respondents described Andy Burke’s presentation as particularly enjoyable and interesting, the highlight of the conference! Some respondents recommended that there should be more liaison between speakers to avoid content repetition. It is suggested that educational speakers from abroad be invited to present at this conference.

PLENARY SESSION
Although respondents described this session as informative and beneficial, it was described as far too lengthy. Less presentation and more interaction and debate would have been preferable.

DISCUSSION DOCUMENTS
Many respondents stated that they would like the discussion documents to be circulated to delegates well in advance of the conference in order to allow delegates to read and understand their content for discussion. One participant suggested that only one theme should be discussed at the conference to allow a more focussed discussion to take place.
TIMETABLE

Overall, respondents were happy with the conference timetable. It was agreed by many participants that working until 7pm on the Friday evening was too late since many had travelled a long distance to Galway that morning. More time for interaction, debate and discussion was requested, with less time for formal presentation. One respondent commented that more time should be allocated to smaller discussion groups. Greater panel discussion and survey type sessions to assess the needs of teachers would be a bonus. It was suggested that the subject topic of speakers be clearly visible on the timetable.

MATERIALS/HANDOUTS/AV EQUIPMENT

Overall, delegates wanted more handouts/paperwork from the conference. It was suggested that the proceedings of the conference and the discussion group notes should be sent to delegates. It was also recommended that a reference list should be circulated at the conference. Some delegates expressed difficulty in viewing the visuals on stage.

Future Topics

The most popular suggestions included:

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<th>Pre service teacher education</th>
<th>Professional development</th>
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<td>Early education</td>
<td>Pupil diversity -- multi cultural education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>INTO participation</td>
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<td>Remedial education</td>
<td>The role of parents</td>
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<td>Stress management</td>
<td>Arts education</td>
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<td>Time management</td>
<td>Modern languages</td>
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<td>The role of middle management</td>
<td>Self esteem</td>
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<td>The changing role of the principal teacher</td>
<td>Impact of Education Act 2000 and Education Welfare Act</td>
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<td>Curriculum implementation</td>
<td>Litigation</td>
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<td>An Ghaeilge</td>
<td>Bullying</td>
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## APPENDIX I

### Profile of Interview Respondents

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Size of School</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Classes Taught</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Seven Teacher School</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>5th &amp; 6th</td>
<td>nonpromoted</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;30</td>
<td>5th &amp; 6th</td>
<td>nonpromoted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Two Teacher School</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>Junior and Senior Infants</td>
<td>Principal</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1st &amp; 2nd</td>
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<td>30-40</td>
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<td>40+</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1st &amp; 2nd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>40+</td>
<td>1st, 2nd &amp; 3rd</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Two Teacher School</td>
<td></td>
<td>3rd, 4th, 5th &amp; 6th</td>
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</tr>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>2nd, 3rd &amp; 4th</td>
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<td>3rd &amp; 4th</td>
<td>Deputy Principal</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Two Teacher School</td>
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<td>Junior &amp; Senior Infants,</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st &amp; 2nd</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Two Teacher School</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Junior &amp; Senior Infants,</td>
<td>Principal</td>
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<td>1st</td>
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APPENDIX 2

Multi-Class Teaching Interview Questions

GENERAL
Number of teachers in school ...........................................................................................................
Geographical location ............................................................................................................................
Gender Age <30, 31-40, 41-50, 51+ ....................................................................................................
Role ......................................................................................................................................................
   (Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal, Special Duties, Non-Promoted)
Classes taught ....................................................................................................................................... 
Class teacher ......................................................................................................................................... 
Support Teacher ....................................................................................................................................
Resource Teacher for Special Needs ....................................................................................................... 
Date of Interview ................................................................................................................................... 
Length of Interview ............................................................................................................................... 

CURRICULUM
- What are the challenges in delivery of curriculum, in a multi-class situation?
- What are your needs as a teacher in a multi-class regarding the implementation of the revised curriculum?
- Do you think the inservice training you received from the curriculum support unit adequately dealt with the particular problems faced by multi-class teachers? How could inservice in relation to the primary curriculum be improved?
- What are the particular challenges for infant teaching? (Play, informal activities, pre-reading)

CLASSROOM ORGANISATION
- What is the most difficult organisational problem you face?
- How do you organise your classroom? Do you use group teaching in your class? How do you structure, organise or manage your groups?
- What extra stresses and problems do you deal with in a multi-class classroom? Do you think that teachers in multi-classes have a greater workload than teachers in single grade classes?
- What are your particular approaches to discipline in a multi-class situation? Are there particular challenges in relation to discipline in multi-classes?
SPECIAL NEEDS

- What developments would you like to see regarding the level of supports and resources you receive in your school to support pupils with special needs?
- Are there other ways to organise the remedial/learning support and the resource teaching services in order to meet the needs of schools with multi-classes?
- What strategies do you use in the classroom to cater for children with special needs?

ICT

- Do you use IT in your classroom? What problems, if any, do you experience? How do you organise IT in the classroom?
- Do you think that ICT could be a support for teachers teaching in a multi-class situation?
- What are your training needs in the area of ICT? (Curriculum, Classroom Management)

STAFF RELATIONS

- Do you feel you are working as part of an effective team?
- Are there particular difficulties pertaining to staff collaboration in schools with multi-classes? Do you work with your colleagues on any aspect of the curriculum or school organisation?
- What are the particular challenges for staff meetings in your school?
- Does your school have staff meetings? Are minutes kept? Is there an agenda set? Is there follow through?
- What, in your opinion, is the most effective means of developing a more collegial approach to school organisation and promoting a collaborative culture in any school which has multi-grade classes and in your school in particular?

SCHOOL ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATION

- Do all teachers get an opportunity to teach all class levels? How is the allocation of classes determined?
- How are policies developed in your school? Are all members of staff involved?
- What are the Health and Safety issues in small schools with multi-classes?
- How do you, as principal carry out the administrative tasks, which are an essential part of the role of the principal? Would you have any suggestions to make regarding your dual role?
- How are issues such as EPV days and yard supervision organised?
- Is the school building adequate for the needs of the school?
- How involved are parents in the work of the school?
- Does your school have ancillary staff? What are their duties? (secretary/clerical, caretaker, classroom/special needs assistant)
Teaching in Multi-Classes: An INTO Report

• How much time do you spend outside of school hours on school related tasks? What kinds of tasks are you involved in after school?

SCHOOL PLANNING
• In developing a school plan in multi-class situations what extra considerations are necessary?
• Do you think it is helpful to cluster small schools for the purposes of developing a school plan?
• What do you think, should be the maximum class size for multi-classes?

TEACHER EDUCATION/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
• Do you think that the challenges faced by multi-class teachers are adequately dealt with in the Colleges of Education? Did you do teaching practice in a multi-class situation? Do you think all student teachers should do teaching practice in a multi-class?
• Would you have appreciated a mentor when you first took up a position in a multi-class situation? What role do you think a mentor could play, in the induction process of teachers in multi-class situations?
• What kind of inservice/professional development opportunities would best address your needs?
• What are the advantages for pupils in being taught in multi-class situations? What are the disadvantages?
• What are the advantages for teachers in multi-class situation? Are there disadvantages? What changes would you like to see?

ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................
## APPENDIX 3

### Slide Presentations

### Multi-grade Teaching

*Milo Walsh, Education Committee*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Negative Aspects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983/84 37%</td>
<td>• Classes too large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/99 44%</td>
<td>• Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42% &lt; Seven teachers</td>
<td>• Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wider abilities and interests</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Features</th>
<th>Negative Effects on Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gender issues</td>
<td>• Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Healthier social relationship</td>
<td>• Feeling on helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of belonging</td>
<td>• Feelings on inadequacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mirrors society</td>
<td>• Professional burnout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greater knowledge of child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Range of teaching methodologies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn to learn earlier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low absentee rates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multi-grade Teaching</th>
<th>Discussion Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cool for kids</td>
<td>• Classroom assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tough on teachers</td>
<td>• Classroom infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pre-service and in-service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Classroom management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time management</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embracing Change</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Mentoring and Co-operation</td>
<td>• Recognise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Methodologies</td>
<td>• Realise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community based solutions</td>
<td>• Revise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# ICT in Multi-classes

*Martin Fogarty, Fidora National School, Co Kilkenny*

## What works for one!
- Ideas
- Possibilities
- Suggestions
- Experiences
- Examples – during discussion

## Computer – Extra Teacher
- Shared area
- Very Useful … extra resource
- Shares work load
- Individual attention
- Distraction
- You can switch off the computer

## Audits
- What have you got?

## Human Audit
- Any interested teachers?
- If yes:
  - What is their level of interest?
  - Addicts or “So-so”
  - What skill level have they?
  - Any backup services available?

## Hardware Audit
- How many computers?
- Where are they?
- How many classrooms?
- Scanner?
- Digital camera?
- Internet access?
- Network?

## Data Projector
- Yes?
- No?

## Software Audit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT FREE</th>
<th>CONTENT RICH</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Word processors</td>
<td>☐ Curriculum based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Art/image editors</td>
<td>☐ General interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Database</td>
<td>☐ Fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Web authoring</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Software
- List
- Suitability
### Plan
- What do you want to do?
- What can you do?

### 'Things' you might like to do! (1/2)
#### CURRICULUM SOFTWARE
- History program
- Irish package
- Maths disk
- Normans CD
- Spellings
- Nature

### 'Things' you might like to do! (2/2)
#### CONTENT FREE SOFTWARE
- Essays/Stories/Book
- Poem
- Electronic book
- Geography project
- Graphs
- Nature survey

### Objectives
- By the end of the year the pupils will be able to write a story, use a piece of curriculum software, and do an IT based project.
- The computer will be used as a reinforcing resource for day to day subject areas.
- The computer will be a source of enjoyment, recreation and discipline for the pupils.
- Get headphones.
- Anything else is a bonus!

### Possible plan for a 'Keen User'
- A real addict

### Situation
- 3 or 4 classes
- 30 pupils
- 1 computer
- No data projector
- A few bits of software
- Loads of enthusiasm

### System
- 5 x 45 min sessions each day
  = 25 possible sessions per week.
- Computer at back of room behind a press.
- Pupils divided into 10 groups of 3.
- 20 x sessions — each group gets 2 sessions:
  1 x session for tutorial
  1 x session used as class lesson
  3 x sessions used as “Reward Sessions.”
## Computer Timetable for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MON</th>
<th>TUES</th>
<th>WED</th>
<th>THUR</th>
<th>FRI</th>
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<tr>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>Tutorial</td>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>Group 9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.15</td>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Group 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Group 7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spare</td>
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<td>2.00</td>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Group 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group 8 PE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What will they do?

Group first session each week

**CONTENT FREE SOFTWARE**

1. Sept to Halloween writing stories
2. Halloween to Christmas posters and cards
3. Christmas to Easter geography project
4. Easter to Summer art

### Rules

- One pair of hands only at a time on computer
- No excess noise or roughness
- Equal sharing regardless of ability
- Allocated activity to be worked on
- Pupils personally responsible for catching up on any class-work missed and for finding out homework
- Machine to be turned off – covered and discs replaced after use
- Penalties … the obvious

### What will they do?

Groups second session each week to work on weekly assignments

Content free software: September

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>And/Or</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Maths program</td>
<td>fractions part</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Irish CD words</td>
<td>1 - 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Irish CD words</td>
<td>21 - 40</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Normans</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Examples of Work

- Surveys Database
- Poetry Powerpoint
- Geography projects Powerpoint
- History of mines, blacksmith, cures WEB
- Book and CD Excel
- Graph
- Irish, maths, tables, cards
- Midi files
- Video files
- Newsletters
- Infants Gaeilge

### What will they do?

Class lesson each week on chosen topic

**September**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mountains of Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rivers of Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Amazon Rain Forests</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Graphs on the computer</td>
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## School Development Planning

**Sean Balfe, Regional Co-Ordinator, SDPS – Primary**

### School Development Planning

**INTO Consultative Conference on Education**
Friday, November 16th 2001

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Development Planning</th>
<th>Priorities...</th>
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<tr>
<td>The concept underpinning development planning is that each school would undertake, on an ongoing basis, a limited number of small scale development projects identified as important priorities.</td>
<td>Prioritising is a process through which we identify which of the broad areas of concerns need tackling first. Prioritising accepts that not everything can be tackled at once.</td>
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</table>

**(White Paper 1995)**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDP can be used as...</th>
<th>Ultimate aim...</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- A systematic approach to the management, pacing and implementation of change</td>
<td>If the ultimate aim of SDP is to bring about continuous improvements in pupil progress and achievement, then it must begin by focussing on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A framework for review, monitoring and self evaluation</td>
<td>- The learning needs of the pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A means of dovetailing national curricula, local context factors and individual pupil needs</td>
<td>- The teaching strategies necessary to address those needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A strategy for continuous school improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Role of facilitator...

The facilitator's role is to empower, enable and guide school communities in the research, development and implementation of strategies to meet their own prioritised development needs in the interests of pupil learning.

SDPS 2000
Teaching in Multi-Classes: An INTO Report

Planning Day

- St. Anywhere NS
- St. Elsewhere NS
- Brainstorming
- St. Hereabouts NS
- St. Thereabouts NS

Planning Day

- St. Anywhere NS
- St. Elsewhere NS
- Planning
- St. Hereabouts NS
- St. Thereabouts NS

Planning Day

- Action plans...
- Strategic plans...
- Policies...
- Continuing work...
- St. Anywhere NS
- St. Elsewhere NS
- St. Hereabouts NS
- St. Thereabouts NS

Planning Day

- Action plans...
- Strategic plans...
- Policies...
- Continuing work...
- St. Anywhere NS
- St. Elsewhere NS
- St. Hereabouts NS
- St. Thereabouts NS

Ongoing Support – Mutual / Facilitator

Year 1

- School review
- Priorities
- Action plans:

- St. Anywhere NS
- St. Elsewhere NS
- St. Hereabouts NS
- St. Thereabouts NS
### Examples of Planning Topics
- Codes of behaviour
- Routine procedures e.g. information for new and/or substitute staff
- Assessment & record keeping
- Curriculum areas
- Enrolment
- Information for parents
- Other

### Year 2
- Vision / Mission / Aims
- Policy Formation
- Strategic Planning

### Examples of Planning Topics
- Curriculum implementation
- Enrolment / Attendance
- Deployment of LST / Resource
- Vision / Aims
- Strategic planning
- Homework
- Other

### Teachers' evaluations
Q. How well were your school’s priorities addressed on the SDP day?

R.
- **Excellently**
- **Very Well**
- **Well**
- **Other**

### Teachers' Comments
'This should be available on an on-going basis, particularly to smaller schools, it’s an invaluable help.'

'Very good idea because all teachers have same problems to be discussed.'

'Clustering-very good idea - very beneficial.'

'Useful in sharing concerns, difficulties and strategies to deal with them.'

### Teachers' Comments
'Great to swap ideas with those in a similar situation.'

'Time to sit and plan is so much appreciated by those who plan for multi-class teaching on a daily basis.'

### Schools working together
- Continuing to cluster e.g. on school based curriculum days
- Networks based in Education Centres
- Principals' release days
- Deployment of LST / Resource Teachers
- Specialising in particular aspects of planning
- Summer Courses
- Shared Staff meetings

There are no quick fixes. The task is to search for a string of 1% improvements so that significant and substantial gains in efficiency and effectiveness can flow to a school over many years. Principals, teachers and partners regard themselves as running a marathon, not the 100 metres relay. The pace of change should be a myriad of small steps.

Adapted from Murtstoyd (1989)
Primary Curriculum Support Programme

Joan Crowley O'Sullivan and Tom Colgan, Assistant Co-Ordinators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Curriculum Support Programme</th>
<th>Primary Curriculum Support Programme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTO Education Conference</td>
<td>• Textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>• Group work</td>
</tr>
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<td>November 16th 2001</td>
<td>• Active learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mixed ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer tutoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary Curriculum Support Programme

- The Primary Curriculum
  - Principles of Learning
  - Defining Features
  - Differentiation
  - Integration

Primary Curriculum Support Programme

- In-service seminar
- Curriculum advisory line
- E-mail
- English support
- Regional support service
References


the Pacific. Apia, Western Samoa: UNESCO Office for the Pacific States.


Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.