

MULTIAGE INSTRUCTION AT HOKKAIDO INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL



Multiage instruction has been an important means of delivering the curriculum at Hokkaido International School for much of its history. In 2012 - 13, HIS will complete the transition to multiage instruction at all levels of the school. This pamphlet sets out to explain why HIS adopted multiage learning at all levels.

WHAT DOES MULTIAGE LEARNING MEAN?

It means that children whose ages place them in different grades are taught together in one class. At HIS classes are combined as follows:

ELEMENTARY

- EY3 & EY4 (ages 3 – 5) one class
- Kinder & Grade 1 (ages 5 -- 7) two classes
- Grade 2 & Grade 3 (ages 7 – 9) two classes
- Grade 4 & Grade 5 (ages 9 – 11) two classes

MIDDLE SCHOOL

- Grade 6 to Grade 8 (Learning Group)

HIGH SCHOOL

- Grade 9 & Grade 10 (Learning Group)
- Grade 11 & Grade 12 (Learning Group)

WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF MULTIAGE INSTRUCTION?

1. Differentiation

It is simply not the case that all students in a given grade are working at the same level. As they grow older and move through the Grades, it is easier to teach students collectively. Basically, a class of Grade 9 students are more likely to have similar educational needs than a class of Grade 2 students. Why? Because the developmental range at lower grades is broader, and because children – especially younger ones – learn in bursts. They spring forward for some weeks or months and then “plateau” for a while before the next leap forward. Such differences have usually disappeared by the time a student is in his or her teens, but are often still very obvious in younger children.

It is also the case that children are often “ahead” in one subject while struggling in another. A “Grade 3” student may have a real talent for mathematics (and could rise to the challenge of doing more challenging work) but might still find reading and writing difficult (and be functioning at a lower level). A multiage class will better meet such a student’s needs than the “one size fits all” approach.

2. Teacher continuity

In some schools, the class teacher moves up through the grades with his or her class of children. In other schools, teachers specialize in teaching a given grade and have each class for one school year. There are pros and cons either way. By design, our multiage classes at HIS allow teachers to get to know students over a two-year syllabus cycle with less “getting to know you” time for both teachers and students.

3. Students learning from students

Every teacher who teaches a multiage class notes the value of students learning not only from the teacher, but also from each other. Older children commonly mentor younger ones. Some parents worry that this is a waste of their time, but it is actually an excellent way for children to consolidate and reinforce their learning. It can also raise their self-esteem, encourage responsible behavior, and establish a healthy class ethos.

MULTIAGE INSTRUCTION AT HOKKAIDO INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

4. Teacher absences

If a teacher is sick or away, there is not the same level of interruption to the planned curriculum with parallel classes. Even if a substitute teacher is present, having two teachers and classes “on the same page” allows the remaining teacher to provide uninterrupted lesson plans, context and support.

5. Cooperative teaching and learning

One of the biggest advantages of having two classes at each level is the opportunity for two class teachers to plan and teach together. Pairs of teachers share responsibility and teach according to their strengths. It is an effective use of time and expertise for each to take the lead in preparing and teaching particular topics or subjects.

Cooperation is, of course, possible between teachers of different grades, but with two parallel classes at each level, such cooperation is built into the system. Parallel classes also allows for greater diversity of thinking and learning. Group discussions are more dynamic and interesting, and field trips are more successful when two classes are combined.

6. Student relationships

Traditional age-grouped classes artificially separate students from their friends. With multiage instruction, students stop caring about grade levels and begin to see that everyone in the larger group they work with is a potential friend.

7. ELL (English Language Learners)

With two parallel classes we have more control over balancing language needs. Moreover, the time of ELL teachers can be more effectively used by teaching together students who may have similar needs but are actually in different grades. (For example, absolute beginners in both grades 2 and 3 can be taught together; that may not be possible – and would certainly be more complicated – if the grades were separate.)

8. Gender

It is in many ways beneficial for children to be in classes where there is a balance between girls and boys. If we had just one class in each grade we would have no control over this balance.

9. Admission

Elementary has a maximum class size of twenty students. Some grades are close to this limit while others are smaller. The need for a waiting list is less likely with multiage classes. In secondary it allows for placement flexibility.