

# The Multi-aged Classroom

(<http://ministry-to-children.com/teaching-multi-age-classrooms/>)

Put a fifth grader in a classroom with a six year old and you've got Miley Cyrus meets Hello Kitty. Two very different worlds collide. The Miley fan is thinking of using her allowance to buy eye shadow, if her mom allows. The Hello Kitty fan has just fallen off her chair, thinking that she really wants to play dress-up. Maybe she'll be a princess today, or maybe Minnie Mouse. But then again she has that new ballerina outfit...

There they are staring you in the face on a Sunday morning, both with that far-off look in their eyes. Your church is a small one, so children of varying age levels are typically grouped together like this. You've got a great lesson in hand. Now, how do you convey it? How did that one room schoolteacher do it all and still maintain her sanity?

Not to fear. It is possible, beneficial, and one of the best things about teaching in a small church setting. Here are some considerations to make while planning for and teaching to a multi-age classroom.

1. Ensure that the lesson plan is interactive: Use varied instructional strategies: lots of visuals, movement, hands-on activities, videos, role playing, listening cues for Bible passages, picture books, music, etc.
2. Factor in attention spans: Studies indicate that a child's attention span is generally one minute longer than their age. A six year old might be able to focus for seven minutes. Plan accordingly. Provide a teacher directed activity then a child-directed activity and repeat.
3. Provide structure they can count on: Younger children especially thrive on routines. Build them in to every lesson. Utilize activities such as an opening prayer, an ice breaker, a Bible lesson, game, art project, and prayer. Be consistent, but allow for creativity within the structure.
4. Utilize the older child in a leadership role: Allowing the older students to help builds responsibility, character, and maturity. Invite them to distribute supplies. Use their specific individual gifts to help teach. Have students read passages or picture books if they are confident readers. Have older students provide music accompaniment in worship or create artwork as a visual for your lesson. A young athlete might show pictures of playing a sport and discuss discipline (and be on top of the world doing so!) Whatever you do, ensure that each student has advanced warning so that they can be prepared and confident for their part of the lesson.
5. Set the tone: Model how to give encouragement, how to get along, how to work together. Emphasize what you expect out of each activity. If it's a game, model what to do and what not to do. Be over the top and silly, yet know when to be firm. Give clear and simple directions. Let each child know what their individual role is.
6. Promote cooperation and teamwork: Group students differently, depending on each activity. Sometimes independent work is necessary. Other times, components of the lesson would be better off shared with a partner, a group of four, or two teams of ten. Mix age groupings to coincide with your desired outcome and match your learning assessments accordingly. Be flexible, creative, and know your students well!