

**Improving Multigrade Teaching:
Action Research with Teachers in Rural Sri Lanka**

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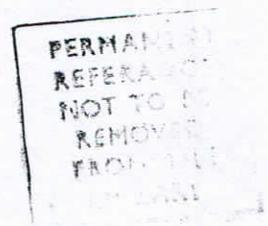
*A thesis submitted for the Institute of Education,
University of London for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy*

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Institute of Education
University of London
2005

UCLIB



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Abstract

The study focuses on prevalence, problems and effective strategies for multigrade teaching. Through an intervention, planned and implemented collaboratively with teachers, the study contributes to the improvement of multigrade teaching and status of primary education in Sri Lanka.

The five research questions addressed by the field study were as follows: (i) *What are the contextual characteristics of multigrade teaching rural schools?* (ii) *What are the current practices of multigrade teaching and the challenges faced by these multigrade teachers?* (iii) *What innovations could be planned to improve multigrade teaching?* (iv) *What is the nature of the intervention that could be made in collaboration with teachers to improve multigrade teaching?* (v) *What is the impact of the intervention?* The action research framework developed to address these questions was a multi-phased field study. The sample area was confined to a rural education zone.

Phase 1 involved condensed fieldwork in thirty eight schools and a study of multigrade practices through case studies in three schools. Phase 2 involved developing an innovative strategy for multigrade teaching and its adoption through an intervention with seventeen multigrade teachers from ten schools. Phase 3 studied the impact on student achievement through a pre- and post-test-one-control-group quasi-experimental design and obtaining feedback from teachers on their satisfaction.

Multigrade teaching was found to be a necessity in a range of school contexts and their quality of teaching was unsatisfactory. During the intervention the innovative lesson planning strategy accompanied by a reorganisation of mathematics curriculum was adopted by multigrade teachers over a period of seven months. In-service support was provided through workshops and school visits. The impact of the intervention was positive.

The study recommends policy adjustments for reorganisation of the national primary curricula to facilitate multigrade lesson planning, capacity building of teacher educators on multigrade teaching, incorporation of multigrade teaching in teacher education curricula accompanied by the use of collaborative frameworks in teacher capacity building. The recommendations for research include follow-up studies on the intervention, studies on prevalence of multigrade teaching, and small-scale action research to evolve successful multigrade classroom practices.