

Unravelling the Mysteries of Multi-Age Grouping



An Early Education Reform Group Publication

November 1987

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Lessons learnt well

*The habits
of our childhood and youth are disquietingly
close to the truths of our later lives.*

*For instance,
I can still recite the rhymes I learnt before
I learnt much else. At times they're useful.*

*And I still
carefully avoid the cracks in the footpaths
I'm walking on, though I lack any reason for it.*

*At railway crossings,
numbers rattle through my brain as I persist
in counting the carriages of each train, unconsciously.*

*Only the rhymes
are certain; I tread carefully for fear of one day
breaking bones, and the counted carriages are years
rushing past.*

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Lesson for the week

First Lesson

of the first lesson, and in the second
the first lesson of the first lesson.

Second Lesson

from the first lesson, and in the second
the first lesson of the first lesson.

Third Lesson

from the first lesson, and in the second
the first lesson of the first lesson.

Fourth Lesson

from the first lesson, and in the second
the first lesson of the first lesson.

Fifth Lesson

from the first lesson, and in the second
the first lesson of the first lesson.

from the first lesson, and in the second
the first lesson of the first lesson.

from the first lesson, and in the second
the first lesson of the first lesson.

Foreword

The Early Education Reform Group continues to make a significant contribution to education in Queensland. This booklet represents another of their contributions.

The booklet is written for parents wanting to know more about schooling for children in their early years. Some of our leading educators in this field have contributed articles and I commend to you their articles.

After reading this booklet I invite you to share with members of the Group your views on any of the material presented. They would love to hear from you.

Best wishes

NEIL FLANAGAN

Principal - Craigslea State School

Introduction

Would you like to see an education system in our schools under which **all children** could develop their capacity to the fullest? A system where they learnt not only to read and write and compute but how best they could contribute to the community we live in? A system which would bring success to every child? Of course you would!

For many years now, there has been increasing public awareness that all has not been well in the early years of schooling. Quite clearly the traditional education system has not been catering for the needs of a significant number of children. Indeed, in many cases, children have been damaged by it.

Members of the Early Education Reform Group have been campaigning for seven years to achieve change to a more flexible, non-graded, child-centred system. Instead of concentrating on having each child cover a certain amount of work in a set time, 'a child-centred' system would be geared to what is well known about children's growth and development, and their individual needs and interests.

Multi-Age Grouping (also called Family Grouping) is one system which allows fulfilment of our aims. We have been encouraged to see a number of enlightened principals and teachers prepared to have a go at implementing Multi-Age Groups. The change has been dramatic in its impact on the classroom situation. It has been very heart-warming to walk into some of those rooms and see children operating freely, naturally and happily - an environment just right for children to explore, to question, to make choices and decisions, to grow and learn.

Don't imagine this has been easy! Classes are still too large for true individualised instruction. Equipment suitable for 5 - 8 year olds, blocks, games, puzzles, water-play and sand-play etc., is seldom available. Many rooms are too small to allow free movement for children still needing much physical activity. There is not nearly enough help for teachers in the form of paid teacher-aides. Suitable inservice training, in school time, is rarely available.

Despite all those restrictions, dedicated teachers are working extremely hard both in school and out, to make Multi-Age Grouping work. They spend countless hours of their own time making much needed resources, and endless planning with their co-teachers. With the help of co-operative parents in the classroom a great deal has been achieved.

This booklet has been produced by the Early Education Reform Group in an effort to support those teachers and parents. There has been quite natural anxiety on the part of some parents regarding a change in their child's schooling. Many questions have been asked and we have attempted to answer some of the most-commonly asked of those questions. Articles on various aspects of Multi-Age Grouping have been contributed by some of Queensland's most experienced educationalists. We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation of everyone concerned.

LIL GWYTHYR

Editor

Listen While You Speak

Don't say you are right too often, teacher.
Let the students realise it.
Don't push the truth:
It's not good for it.
Listen while you speak

Bertolt Brecht

Introduction

World Bank is one of the largest financial institutions in the world. It provides financial assistance to member countries for development projects. The Bank's mission is to reduce poverty and improve living standards in developing countries.

The Bank's operations are based on the principle of financial self-reliance. It provides loans to member countries on a concessional basis, with interest rates and repayment periods determined by the Bank's policies.

The Bank's capital is provided by its member countries. The Bank's assets are primarily loans to member countries. The Bank's income is derived from the interest on its loans and from the sale of its assets.

The Bank's operations are subject to the supervision of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF provides technical assistance to member countries in the form of advice and training. The IMF also monitors the Bank's operations and reports to the member countries.

The Bank's operations are also subject to the supervision of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO provides technical assistance to member countries in the form of advice and training. The WTO also monitors the Bank's operations and reports to the member countries.

The Bank's operations are also subject to the supervision of the World Bank Group. The World Bank Group consists of the Bank, the International Development Association (IDA), and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The World Bank Group provides financial assistance to member countries for development projects.

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LEWYTH

1990

1. Name of the person
2. Address of the person
3. Date of birth
4. Date of issue
5. Date of expiry

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Questions and Answers

Relating to How the School is Organised

A1. Question: What is the difference between Multi-Age Groups and Composite Classes?

Answer: The difference lies in the fact that Composite Classes are formed through organisational necessity, whereas Multi-Age Groups are formed because of particular beliefs about teaching.

Composite Classes have 2 year levels (1 and 2, or 3 and 4, perhaps 4 and 7) and generally operate two separate programs. There is little interaction between the two levels.

Multi-Age Groups have children from two or more consecutive years, all working together with one or more teachers in the same room. For example, there could be approximately 25 children from Years 1 and 2 with one teacher, or 50 children from Years 1, 2 and 3 with two teachers - there are many possible arrangements.

In a Multi-Age Group, children are allowed to progress at their own rate. Most of the children will cover the work in the normal amount of time. However, because of the wide variation in the rates at which children develop and learn, there will be some children who need an extra year. In a Multi-Age Group this presents no problem and there is no sense of failure.

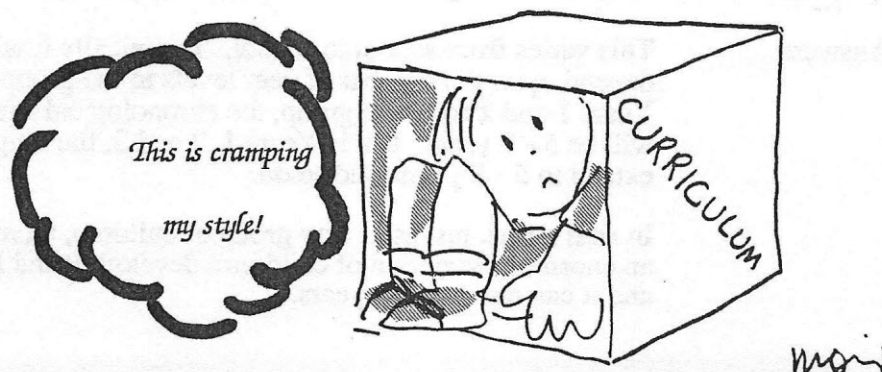
Children in a Multi-Age Group mix freely, are encouraged to co-operate and help each other, and friendships are formed right across the group. There is no pressure, and learning proceeds happily and comfortably.

A2. Question: What is the range of ages in a Multi-Age Group?

Answer: This varies from school to school. Technically it will depend upon the number of year levels in the groups. If Years 1 and 2 form the group, the chronological age range will be 5 - 7 years. If it is Years 1, 2 and 3, the range will extend to 5 - 8 years, and so on.

In real terms, just as in any group of children, there will be an enormous variation of children's developmental levels, and it can cover many years.

- A3. Question: How much time do teachers spend planning together?
- Answer: To quote one teacher - "As much time as it takes, short of divorce"!
- Actually teachers spend many hours, both in school and in their own time. This time is spent keeping track of where each child will go next. Teachers are also constantly seeking/making resources to match children and activities.
- A4. Question: Is the curriculum the same as in the traditional school?
- Answer: Yes, but the way in which the curriculum is put into action may be very different.
- A5. Question: Are teachers specially trained for this type of teaching?
- Answer: Teacher-training courses attempt to cover a full range of teaching approaches. Inservice training for teachers in the field is the responsibility of the Education Department, the school, and the individual.
- The Early Education Reform Group considers that **every teacher and administrator should be given in-depth training in the area of child growth and development**, whether at College or as inservice training. We think inservice training should be given in school time.
- A6. Question: What happens if parents object to their child going into a Multi-Age Group?
- Answer: "Where possible, schools need to attempt to offer choices to parents", said one principal. Sometimes choice is not possible owing to organisational difficulties. If parents are strongly opposed to the Multi-Age Group concept, perhaps they should choose some other school.
- A7. Question: What is wrong with the old system? I did all right under it!
- Answer: Many children did do all right under it, but many others fared very badly under it. It has always been a fairly rigid system in which children entered Year 1 at age 5 - 6 years and were expected to cover a set amount of work that first year. Then they moved on to Year 2 and, after another year, to Year 3 and so on. Repeating a year has always been frowned on, resulting in many children moving up a year before having mastered the work of the previous year.



A7. Answer: (cont.) Such a system pre-supposes that all children entering school do so with certain basic skills already developed, which is far from reality. Rate of development is unique to each individual child and those rates vary widely. Such variation has a marked effect on what children can manage comfortably in that first year of school. For example, late developers, even though 5-1/2 years old, may still only have language skills of the average 4 year old, which makes learning to read at that stage a difficult, if not impossible, task. **Most of the late developers are perfectly normal children, and just need a little more time. The traditional school system often does not allow that time.**

The result? Year 1 can be a very unhappy experience for such children. They may find great difficulty in understanding the work. The tasks asked of them must seem very confusing and frustrating and it is not long before confidence is lost. If there is any pressure to conform, whether from teachers or parents, negative attitudes soon develop and behaviour problems may occur. As some of these children move through school, reading and maths problems become more evident and very often worsen. Some children are actually labelled "failures" when really it is the system which has failed.

Questions and Answers

Relating to Children's Social and Emotional Well-being

- B1. Question: How do Year 1 children fit in with older children?
- Answer: In most Multi-Age Groups, only about 1/3 of the children will be Year 1. The older children are already at home in the classroom, and younger ones learn quickly about the situation by watching and joining in. Older children are generally very ready to help.
- B2. Question: Do children from the same family tend to be rivals?
- Answer: Generally, no. In most cases, the older children take a delight in caring for a younger brother or sister and they support each other.
- B3. Question: Don't sensitive younger children feel inadequate when older children are quicker to answer questions?
- Answer: This may be the case at first, but children quickly gain confidence through being successful. They accept quite naturally that there are some things they'll be able to do later on. (Anyway, who says older children are quicker to answer questions!)
- B4. Question: How do you know which teacher to go to if your child is having a problem or seems unhappy?
- Answer: Teachers are equal partners and know all of the children. See the teacher with whom you feel more comfortable. Remember to make an appointment beforehand - teachers are busy people.
- B5. Question: What about children who leave a Multi-Age Group to move to a more traditional class or school? Do they fit in okay?
- Answer: Whenever children move to any different classroom there are adjustments to be made. Some of this will depend upon the new teacher's attitude and whether there is real understanding of how children develop.
- However, if children have experienced a warm, supportive Multi-Age Group environment, they are likely to be confident and have good self-esteem. They should have developed some degree of independence in working and will probably fit in quite well.

B6. Question: Do children in Multi-Age Groups have sufficient children of their own age to be friends with?

Answer: There is usually a good mixture of each age group. In any case, it is not necessarily age that draws children together - after all, we adults don't use age as a pre-condition for making friends! It is more likely to involve similar interests. After a while, children seem to mix quite happily, regardless of age.

B.7 Question: What advantages are there for children in Multi-Age Groups over the traditional system?

Answer: Because there is no set time for children to stay in a Multi-Age Group they are able to go at their own rate and not feel "pushed".

They can make some choices and decisions about their work - this develops confidence and responsibility.

They learn through their own interests which motivates them.

Older children "adopt" younger children and help them.

Children often learn more easily from other children.

Freedom to question and discuss develops language, problem-solving skills, and concentration.

Multi-Age Grouping encourages care and concern for others and lots of co-operation.

"By giving the child opportunities for real choice, we will be preparing him for the decision making which will face him in adult life. He will begin to regard himself as responsible for some of his own learning. His choices will be real and he will be seen as an active learner, rather than a passive recipient of the teacher's instructions"

(*Child Education*, July 1979 - Monica Hughes)

Questions and Answers

Relating to Children's Academic Progress

- C1. Question: What happens when children leave a Multi-Age Group situation and have to move to a traditional class?
- Answer: See Answer B5.
- C2. Question: Much time in Multi-Age Groups seems to be spent playing with blocks and various games etc. - how can they learn properly doing that?
- Answer: It is a well-established fact that children learn best by "doing".

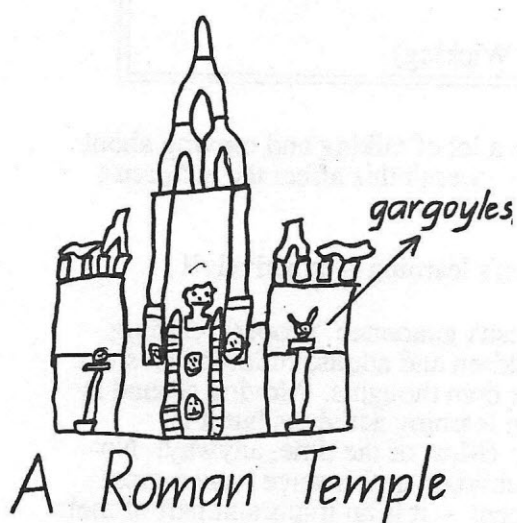
"Children require concrete activity for genuine learning. Verbal explanation or written exposition can be effective only after a basis in concrete activity has been established"

(Piaget for Teachers)

Play is the best way for young children to learn because they enjoy activities and, therefore, are more willing to participate. Blocks, sand and water play, and various games are all activities, specially provided by teachers, for the valuable learning children gain from them. These so-called "games" extend easily into reading, writing, maths, and other areas.

For example, a block building of the City Hall could lead to:

- (a) counting number of blocks used and measuring height of the tower (Maths)
- (b) writing simple sentences about the building and then reading their story to the group (Writing, Spelling, Reading)
- (c) drawing the building (Art).



The Romans built lots of temples to worship their Gods in. Most of temples were small. Only the priests and special helpers were allowed inside. The people worshipped outside.

Drawing and story by a Year 3 child, after a block building activity.

C3. Question:

What does "individualised instruction" mean?

Answer:

Individualised instruction means being aware of each child's particular needs and interests, and then catering for them as far as possible. This can sometimes be done in a one to one situation, but often will have to be carried out with a small group of children. At times it will mean attending to some difficulty or confusion a child has. On the other hand, it can mean making sure a more advanced child has plenty of challenge and the opportunity to extend his learning.

C4. Question: How do teachers know what each child can do? Do they test them regularly?

Answer: Teachers are continually observing children as they go about their activities. By regularly recording how each child manages the various activities, teachers are able to assess how children are progressing. Testing is unnecessary - fostering a love of learning in these early years is more important than any test result. Indeed, testing can cause much anxiety for young children.

"Since marks are inevitably used for comparison, any school which asks its teachers to mark work in the primary years, using percentages or symbols, is intellectually murdering some of the minds it is supposed to be inspiring."

(Bruce Wicking)

C5. Question: There always seems to be a lot of talking and moving about in the Multi-Age Group - doesn't this affect the children's learning?

Answer: Yes, it does affect children's learning - positively!!

Sitting still on a chair doesn't guarantee "proper" learning. By talking with other children and adults, children can share ideas and expand on their own thoughts. Moving around is necessary for many of the learning activities but it is movement for a purpose. (Most of the time, anyway! No-one's perfect!) Besides, children at this stage have a great need for physical movement - it is an important part of their growth and development. An essential part of becoming an independent learner, (i.e. without relying on the teacher all the time), requires that children know where things are kept in the room, and for them to be able to help themselves.

C6. Question: When does a teacher get to do reading, writing, maths, phonic skills etc.?

Answer: (Direct quote from a teacher.) "All day long! We run an integrated program (see separate article on Integration) - one area may overlap several others. There is no need to isolate separate tasks. This is a much more natural and interesting way for children to learn - they like it, too!"

C7. Question: How do children fit in at high school after being in a Multi-Age Group at primary school?

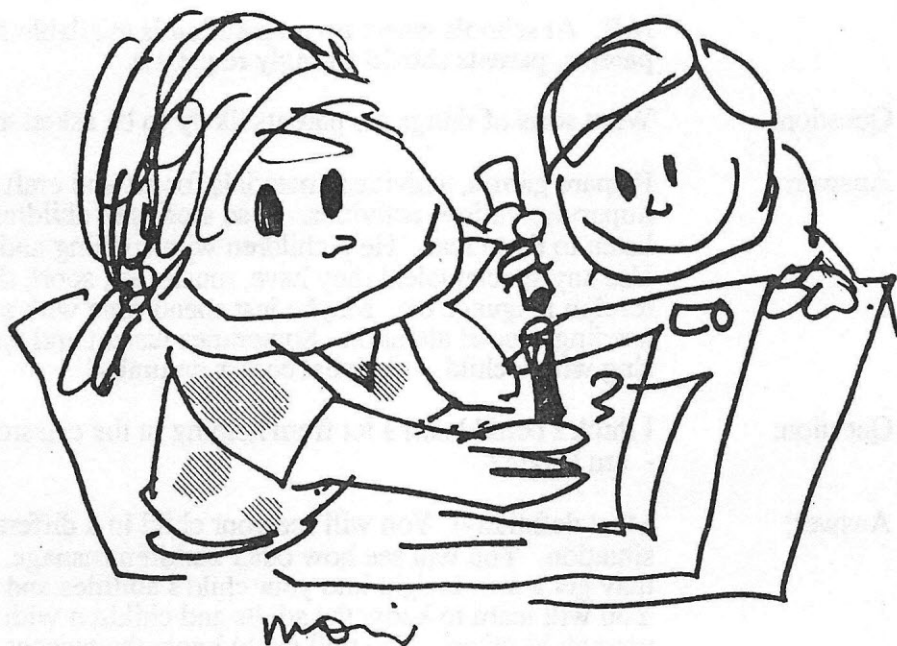
Answer: Multi-Age Group children should not find entering high school a problem. Their confidence and self-esteem should be high after experiencing success in the primary school. They should have research skills, and be able to communicate easily and ask questions. Their independence in learning should ensure that they fit in, as well as, if not better than, other children from traditional schooling.

C8. Question:

How are children with special needs catered for?

Answer:

Multi-Age Group caters for the needs of all children. More advanced children have access to challenging games and activities, and books normally suited to older children. Later developing children are not pressured - they don't have to be pushed in order to be ready for Year 2 or Year 3 next year. New children entering their first year, and who are still functioning at a preschool level, have access to materials suitable for their present stage of development. (Not so, in some schools, unfortunately. Many necessary resources are not yet provided by the Department.)



Questions and Answers

Relating to Parents' Involvement in a Multi-Age Classroom

D1. Question: What preparation is there for parents who volunteer to help in Multi-Age Group classrooms?

Answer: Preparation varies from school to school. Some schools invite parents to "sit-in" the classroom before volunteering their help. Training programs, perhaps just a day or two, are offered at the beginning of the year by some schools. Basic things are dealt with - the new handwriting scheme, what to do when listening to a child read, their responsibilities to both teacher and children, etc. They are made aware of rules that children are expected to keep. Sometimes a class newsletter is sent out, explaining where help is needed with some of the activities. Experienced parents are valuable in helping new volunteers.

N.B. At schools where no preparation is available for parents, parents should strongly request it.

D2. Question: What sorts of things are parents likely to be asked to do?

Answer: Prepare games, activities, materials for art and craft etc. Supervise various activities. Read stories to children and listen to them read. Help children with spelling and writing. Use any special talent they have, music, art, sport, drama, foreign language etc. Maybe just spend time with a child needing special attention. Sometimes just sit and watch, or sing with a child - do what comes naturally!

D3. Question: I think I could learn a lot from helping in the classroom - am I right?

Answer: Most definitely! You will see your child in a different situation. You will see how other children manage. You may get a new insight into your child's abilities and talents. You will learn to know the adults and children with whom your child mixes. You will get to know the teacher, and have the opportunity to talk together at times - much easier than having to set up an appointment.

John Holt in his book *How Children Fail* says:

"School should be a place where children learn what they most want to know, instead of what we think they ought to know"

Children Learn What They Live

*If a child lives with criticism,
He learns to condemn.*

*If a child lives with hostility,
He learns to fight.*

*If a child lives with ridicule,
He learns to be shy.*

*If a child lives with shame,
He learns to feel guilty.*

*If a child lives with tolerance,
He learns to be patient.*

*If a child lives with encouragement,
He learns confidence.*

*If a child lives with praise,
He learns to appreciate.*

*If a child lives with fairness,
He learns justice.*

*If a child lives with security,
He learns to have faith.*

*If a child lives with approval,
He learns to like himself.*

*If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,
He learns to find love in the world.*

Why Multi-Age Grouping?

What's So Special About It?

By Ruth Douglas
Teacher, Administrator
(Initiated the Multi-Age Grouping
program at Ferny Grove)

Multi-Age Grouping is one of the most efficient and effective ways to group children for learning - BECAUSE its prime consideration is CHILDREN.

A Multi-Age Group teacher starts off a new group of children by first asking - What can these children do? Do any of them have special needs? What do they know? What experiences have they shared with their families, preschool, kindergarten or class teachers, last year? What interests them?

Teachers then use the information they gather to fashion a program to fit the needs and interests of the children - such a program is referred to as "child-centred". On the other hand, in a traditional classroom, the children are expected to fit into ready-made programs, referred to as "curriculum-centred".

Multi-Age Group teachers capitalise on what children **can** do and use this to build on. They work to gain the children's confidence, co-operation and trust to create a secure and comfortable classroom. They **don't** force children into performing tasks beyond the level of their capability. They believe that until a child is **ready** to take a particular step forward, it's a waste of time to ask him/her to take it.

As in all classrooms, Multi-Age Group teachers must assess what progress children are making, and then plan the next appropriate steps. They don't need to "test" - instead they constantly observe children working at activities, and make careful records. They use the knowledge they have about children's growth and development to help in their planning. This development occurs in three (3) main areas, all closely interwoven, and taking this knowledge into consideration is the key to happy, successful learning.

1. Social and Emotional Development

Success at a traditional school depends a great deal upon how mature or "grown-up" the child is. A Multi-Age Group classroom welcomes each child whatever his/her stage of "growing-up". Children are encouraged to co-operate with others, to share and take turns, and to keep the class rules, inside and outside the classroom. They are helped to manage their own feelings and not get upset by unexpected happenings. Children mature gradually, at their own rate, and should not be jostled into "growing-up" quickly.

2. Physical Development

A simple chart of the children's height shows that children come in "different sizes". Growth occurs as the central nervous system develops. The rate of growth is not the same for all children. For example, children of the same age and year level differ considerably in the skills of balancing, hopping and skipping, as well as in performing written work. A child's physical development determines many things - the ability to sit still, to listen attentively, to hear differences in sounds, to focus the eyes, to control a pencil etc., etc. Multi-Age Group teachers wait for this development. Skills are gained in easy steps. Teachers set realistic goals and each child is considered in the light of what he/she is capable of doing at this present time.



3. Intellectual Development

A child learns through sensory perception, i.e., hearing, touching, tasting, smelling and seeing. A growing child uses these physical abilities to help explore his/her surroundings. Each new piece of information absorbed by the child is stored in that child's memory bank to be called upon to help interpret new experiences. Remember the wise old saying?

*" I hear and I forget
I see and I remember
I do and I understand."*

That is why children need to be **actively** involved in the classroom. Multi-Age Group classrooms provide a rich, stimulating environment for children to observe, manipulate, plan, question and practise those skills which are important to them to have. This is a **natural process**, and "doing what comes naturally" is the best path to learning. Isn't that what happens in any caring home?

"The young child starting school joins a class with older children - friends or a brother or sister - who provide a comforting link with home and security."

"It increases opportunities for co-operation, particularly with older pupils helping younger ones, and giving them some of the extra attention and practical assistance they need."

"A more natural learning situation is established. Children work at their own natural pace, helping each other by intention or invitation. Their program is not geared to the work of a single year, but can be adjusted over a two or three year period."

(Mr Phil Cullen, Director of Primary Education
from his article *Multi-Age Grouping in Primary Schools* 1978.)

Socialisation

All Learning Together with Confidence

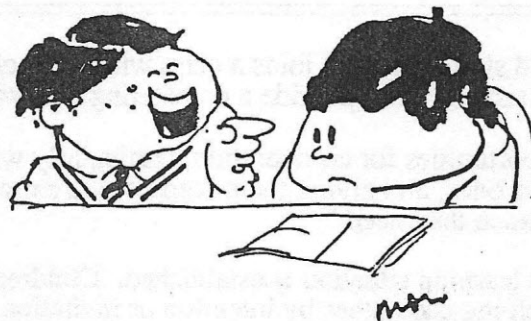
By Lil Gwyther
Ex Kindergarten & Infant Teacher
Founding President of Early
Education Reform Group

Much research has been carried out regarding the effects of open non-graded school systems on the social and emotional well-being of children. Multi-Age Grouping is one such system.

The following outcomes have been found in many multi-age groups:

Because teachers concentrate on what children **can** do, rather than what they **can't** do, there is never any fear of failure. *This builds confidence.*

Because competition is removed from the classroom, there is no comparison with other children, no feelings or fears that "I'm not as good as". *Children are always ready to "have a go".*



Because children are allowed to make choices, and express themselves freely in many ways, - speaking, writing, drawing, modelling with clay, building with blocks, singing, drama etc., etc., *much creative activity takes place.*

Because children's ideas are welcomed, and they are allowed to try them out, they feel good about themselves. They are encouraged to question and discuss things, and *this makes an environment which is good for learning.* (An insecure or anxious child is not in the mood for learning anything.)

Because there is such freedom of choice, and exploration of many ideas, it follows that children are able to learn from their own particular interests. ***This makes learning an exciting and real part of their lives***, so different from 25 children all having to learn the same thing at the same time, whether they are interested or not.

Because Year 1 children enter a group with older children in it who already 'know what to do', settling in is much easier for them. Older children delight in helping the younger ones, and it helps them ***to feel very worthwhile and important***. Again, confidence grows.

Because children mix freely, and are encouraged to work and play together, ***they learn the joys of co-operating - a wonderful start for living in the community***.

Because some of the older children who are late developers need to work at a lower level, they are able to fit in comfortably with younger children. Any pressure to 'keep up' is avoided, and ***children continue to enjoy their learning***. On the other hand, there are always some children, usually quick developers, who are ahead of the rest. In Multi-Age Group classrooms, these children are catered for by having a wide range of materials, such as more advanced books, available. They are encouraged to read widely, to work on projects, and generally 'spread their wings'.

Because some of the late developers may need extra time to cover the work usually covered in the multi-age group, they are able to spend an extra year there ***without feeling they are failures***. (They don't have to leave their friends either.) The terms 'Year 1', 'Year 2', are never emphasised - teachers refer to all the children as one group.

All in all, Multi-Age Grouping caters for children learning in the best possible way. They are allowed to grow and develop naturally. They are given every encouragement, and challenged with new tasks when the time is right for them.

"Play is, in fact, the most complete of all educational processes, for it influences the intellect, the emotions, and the body of the child. It is the only activity in which the whole educational process is fully consummated. There is a maxim of good teaching which says that 'you cannot teach a child anything unless he wants to learn'. This is the same as saying that unless learning is play, it cannot be effective"

Professor N. V. Scarfe
University of British Columbia

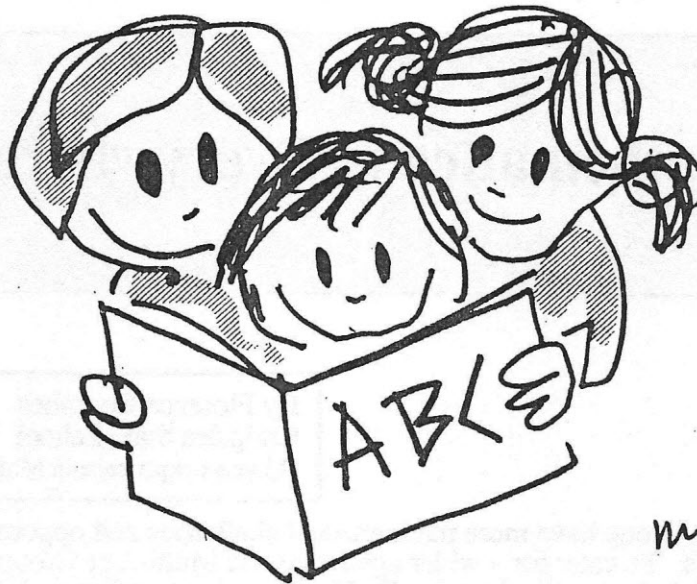
Learning to Read

In a Multi-Age Group Classroom

By Lois Tarling
Teacher
Brisbane Independent School - Kenmore
(11 years experience in Multi-Age Group teaching)

1. **CHILDREN NEED *Real Life Experiences*** as a basis to learning to read
- handling and using a wide range of materials.

Multi-Age Groups offer these real life experiences to children - playing with building materials, cooking, sewing, drawing, watching animals, watching people, growing plants, playing with sand and water.
2. **CHILDREN NEED *to listen to the spoken word*** used in relating to these real life experiences and to try out the language for themselves. Multi-Age Groups allow children many extra opportunities to develop language
- to speak about what they are doing as they build, watch, cook, sew, draw, plant, climb
3. **CHILDREN NEED *to watch other people*** using and enjoying reading. Multi-Age Groups allow children many opportunities to see other children and adults reading for fun, and enjoyment. People read recipe books, signs, directions on how to play a game, directions on how to make things. They read silently and sometimes laugh out loud, or exclaim about some interesting fact they have read children want to do what they see others doing. They learnt to talk and walk because others around them were doing those things. The urge to learn to read happens the same way.
4. **CHILDREN NEED *to build up their confidence*** in their ability to read. Multi-Age Groups give every child the opportunity to 'teach' another child to read. There is always a younger or 'slower' child who needs help.
5. **CHILDREN NEED *to take their own time*** to learn to read. Many children are not ready during the first year, and find great difficulty if pushed. As a result, they are sometimes sent for remedial help, or are mistakenly classed as having a 'learning problem'. The barriers to successful reading have, in the past, often been set up in the first year at primary school. Children in that situation can be turned off reading for life and their confidence shattered if they are pushed. In a Multi-Age Group classroom, they are given **extra time** and the above problems should never arise.



6. **CHILDREN WILL LEARN** to read more easily if they can **choose their own reading material**. Multi-Age Groups allow children to have more say in the kinds of material they wish to read. Some children see their own words written down by an adult, and read them back. Some read messages and signs attached to things they built - 'Please don't touch', 'Post Office', 'Zoo'. Others like to read comics, nursery rhymes or familiar stories. By following their own interests, they enjoy and feel good about learning to read. If children enjoy these early stages they will enjoy reading for the rest of their lives.

"True, or living learning, originates from the child, and indeed directly from some of his stronger interests and drives."

(*Psychology, Piaget and Practice* - Nathan Isaacs)

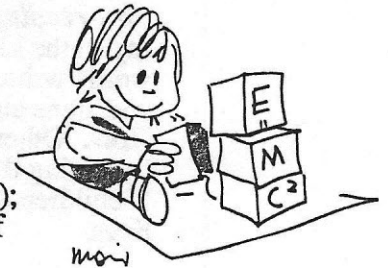
Mathematics is Everywhere

By Florence Coombes
Craigslea State School
(13 years experience in Multi-Age Group Teaching)

Children in a Multi-Age Group have more mathematical challenges and opportunities than in a traditional class. To cater for a wider age range, the Multi-Age Group has a greater variety of materials for practical work. Children are able to select activities at their own level. The fast and the not-so-fast learners can all progress at their own pace, and experience success.

Children like to do what they see older children doing, so in a Multi-Age Group some children tend to select activities at a higher level - they are not threatened by the fear of failure. Their friends can help if they are having difficulty.

Children learn best through play. Play is really work for the child. This work can be fun. In a Multi-Age Group there are many opportunities for the children to initiate their own activities. For example, children playing with blocks may decide to build a car-racing track. Mathematical possibilities are; measurement (term 'perimeter' is introduced); timing (done with a stop-watch); effect of ramps on speed (science); counting (numbers of spectators); order of winners (Peter Brock came third); vocabulary (spectators, pits, circuit, etc).



Children need real life experiences, for example, they enjoy cooking. This activity involves using kitchen utensils, reading recipes, weighing ingredients, science (oven temperatures), counting money (cost of ingredients) and writing (recording the experience). Grouping older children with beginners makes this a smooth and very worthwhile experience.

Children need to understand how maths is used in everyday life. Language development is the most important factor in that understanding, and so it is important that children discuss what they are doing. In a Multi-Age Group the more advanced learners can help the others.

Children in a Multi-Age Group have very positive feelings about themselves. There is always someone they can help and who can help them. In a Multi-Age Group children develop mathematical language at a faster rate. For example, many Year 1 children are familiar with terms such as circumference, diameter, parallel, fraction, etc. through listening to older class members discussing their activities. This discussion and sharing is a very important part of the daily routine in a Multi-Age Group.

Other activities could include, water play, sand play, carpentry, puppetry, shopping, and many others which arise from the children's immediate interests. All of these have endless mathematical possibilities.

"TRUE MATHEMATICS IS NOT MYSTICAL but SIMPLE,
and dare I say, EVEN BEAUTIFUL"

Dr. G. Matthews

Integration

Getting It All Together

By Angela Le Mare
Tutor
BCAE - Kelvin Grove
(7 years experience in Multi-Age Group Teaching)

Most parents are excellent Multi-Age Group teachers, although they probably don't realise it. Take the example of learning to talk . . . Most children learn to speak fluently before they are five years old, just through normal living. (No parent says, "That is the end of your talking lesson for today, Janet. We'll continue at the same time tomorrow".) Talking happens naturally and informally all day long.

Recently, educationalists have observed just how much they can learn from parents. They recognise that parents aren't *only* good teachers of language. When parents take pleasure in encouraging each of their own children to follow and develop personal interests, they are demonstrating another example of good teaching, an example which is relevant to any good classroom.

In schools using the Multi-Age Group system, teachers have to be very aware of the individuality of each child. Within each class, there is a wide range of age differences and an even wider range of interests and abilities. (Parents know how different each of their children can be, but these differences have not always been recognised in the classroom.) Teachers have now realised that the natural, informal approach used by parents in the home is very effective in the classroom. By using children's ideas as a starting point sometimes, the learning that follows is enjoyable as well as worthwhile.

No longer do teachers confine themselves to teaching reading for 1/2 hour, then maths for 1/2 hour, then social studies, then art etc., all in separate (often boring) compartments - although, naturally, there is sometimes a reason for concentrating on one subject area. Now this is more likely to be the picture:

A child has been to Indonesia for a holiday and has brought back a shadow puppet (or saw some during Warana in Brisbane). The whole class is interested and eagerly joins in discussion (Social Studies). Some children want to make their own puppets, using scissors, card etc. (Art/Craft). These puppets are used to act out a play made up by the children themselves, or perhaps a favourite story (Language/Drama). Other children use percussion instruments to provide a musical accompaniment (Music). Making the screen requires some planning and measurement (Maths/Science).

Cashing in on children's genuine curiosity and enthusiasm in this way allows all areas of the curriculum to be drawn together to be integrated into a whole. So, if you walk into a Multi-Age Group classroom, don't expect to see straight rows of silent children. Instead, what you will see is natural, logical and, as a parent, you'll know that it works!

Comenius said: "Let the first foundation of all things be thoroughly laid, unless you wish the whole superstructure to totter".

(from *Child Education*)

They Do Things Differently At School Now!

Parents Adjusting to Change

By Gail Halliwell
Senior Lecturer
BCAE - Kelvin Grove

My 1986 investigation of seven Brisbane schools which introduced Multi-Age Grouping in Years 1, 2 and/or 3, indicated that some parents were highly threatened by the change. Even when they accepted that it was better for young children to be moving about in classrooms, helping one another, working co-operatively with younger and older children and taking different lengths of time to complete learning tasks, they worried:

What if my Johnny doesn't learn to read - I don't understand how they teach it now. How do I know that Susy is learning to spell when they don't have spelling tests? Jane says she loves maths but she never seems to do any tables. I don't understand how the children are learning now, so I feel insecure.

It was very heartening to note that in these seven schools, the teachers and administrators took the concerns of parents very seriously. After all they were experiencing feelings of insecurity themselves as they found it hard to give up old teaching habits and develop skill in new ways of helping children learn. It is one thing to be persuaded that more flexible classrooms are better places for children and another to feel really secure about making it work - until the children begin to show how well they are learning. So the schools were reaching out to parents and finding that they were forming strong bonds with parents, a partnership for the benefit of children.

Strategies that were proving useful in helping parents cope with change included:

- providing opportunities for parents to observe in the classroom. It was reported repeatedly that parents who spend time finding out what children were doing soon became much more secure, even enthusiastic about the new learning approaches they saw being used. And parents appeared to be building on what they learned about new approaches and applying this at home, on visits to supermarkets, and so on. On my visits to schools, I noted that even fathers or mothers who worked, found time to visit occasionally for half an hour or so.
- giving parents choice about whether to enrol their children in Multi-Age Groups - and lots of counselling before they made the decision. It was interesting to note, that when the opportunity to choose was available, there was always a waiting-list for the Multi-Age Group classes.

- providing literature about new approaches. At Multi-Age Group teacher network meetings, teachers began designing brochures that could be handed to parents and others coming to observe in the classroom. Department of Education pamphlets explaining modern approaches to reading, spelling, mathematics and so on were especially popular. Teachers sent out class newsletters that explained the learning that occurs in current classroom activities.
- meetings at school and in parents' homes were promoted to provide opportunities for parents to discuss their insecurities. These were very helpful for many parents who needed to talk through their anxieties with other parents. Public meetings, including P & C meetings, had a role to play, of course, but it was these more informal meetings which seemed to help some parents so much.
- workshops and information nights at the school where guest speakers provided information about modern teaching approaches, and current knowledge about how children learn most effectively, also proved to be very useful.

Of course, opening up avenues for parents to comment on what teachers do in schools can be threatening. Most of the teachers observed in 1986 did feel a little threatened at the start, particularly when some parents also showed signs of anxiety. It is to the credit of both teachers and parents that they were able to establish strong links through strategies such as those above. The benefits could be seen in my last visits to one school in late November, when I talked with parents enrolling new children for 1987. Some of them already had children in the Multi-Age Group classes, and displayed quite a deep understanding of why the classrooms operated as they did. There was a real sense of partnership between these parents, the teachers, and the children learning in the classroom.

One Method of Recruiting Volunteer Help for the Classroom

ANN HAYNES - D.P. Mooloolaba State School
invites you to

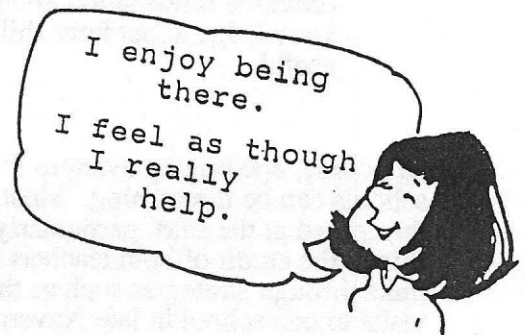
Voluntary Aid Program

time to **SHARE
HELP** and **CARE**



JOIN THE RANKS

QUOTES FROM PARENTS:



A JOINT PARENT/TEACHER PARTNERSHIP IN EDUCATION OFFERS
THE IDEAL BASE ON WHICH TO BUILD SOUND ATTITUDES AND
LEARNING HABITS.

CHILDREN APPRECIATE

A CARING PERSON WHO WILL

LISTEN

SMILE

TALK

HELP

COME REGULARLY

UNDERSTAND A TASK

TEACHERS APPRECIATE

A HAPPY SINCERE PERSON WHO

TAKES TIME TO LISTEN

AND TALK TO CHILDREN

SUPPORTS GOOD

CLASSROOM HABITS AND ATTITUDES

ENJOYS WORKING

WITH CHILDREN

Comments from Students

**Who Have Spent Some Years
in Multi-Age Group Classes
and Are Now in Years 5 & 6**

My third year was the best because I was the oldest.

You make more friends when children are different ages.

**The teacher's more like a friend, she likes you - it was
really like a family.**

It was nice having my big sister with me.

YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS

There were no deadlines for work to be done.

You have to have teachers who understand that system.

Maths was so enjoyable that kids wanted to do it all the time.

We had to work from Maths text books when we went up to Year 4, but that was okay. It was easy.

One of the best things was helping the other kids.

IT WAS GOOD HAVING PARENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

It gives kids more independence to have to do things for themselves.

**Projects are better and more fun if you can choose the
project for yourself.**

(Comment from high school student): I found it very easy to talk to the teachers when I went to high school.

The Little Boy

Helen E. Buckley

Once a little boy went to school.
He was quite a little boy
And it was quite a big school
But the little boy
Found that he could go to his room
By walking right in from the door outside.
He was happy,
And the school did not seem
Quite so big any more.

One morning,
When the little boy had been in school awhile
The teacher said,
"Today we are going to make a picture".
"Good", thought the little boy.
He liked to make pictures.
He could make all kinds,
Lions and tigers,
Chickens and cows,
Trains and boats
And he took out his box of crayons
And began to draw.

But the teacher said,
"Wait
It is not time to begin".
And she waited until everyone looked ready.
"Now", said the teacher
"We are going to make flowers".
"Good", thought the little boy.
He liked to make flowers.
And he began to make beautiful ones
With his pink and orange and blue crayons.

But the teacher said,
"Wait
And I will show you how".
And it was red with a green stem.
"There" said the teacher
"Now, you may begin".

The little boy looked at the teacher's flower.
Then he looked at his own flower.
He liked his flower better than the teacher's
But he did not say this.
He just turned his paper over
And made a flower like the teacher's.
It was red with a green stem.

On another day when the little boy had opened
the door from the outside all by himself,
The teacher said,
"Today we are going to make something with clay."
Good thought the little boy.
He liked clay.
He could make all kinds of things,
Snakes and snowmen,
Elephants and mice,
Cars and trucks.
And he began to pull and pinch
His ball of clay.

But the teacher said,
"Wait
It is not time to begin."
And she waited until everyone looked ready.
"Now", said the teacher
"We are going to make a dish".

"Good", thought the little boy.
He liked to make dishes,
And he began to make some.
They were all shapes and sizes.

But the teacher said,
"Wait
"I will show you how".
And she showed everyone how to make
One deep dish.
"There" said the teacher,
"Now you may begin".

The little boy looked at the teacher's dish.
Then he looked at his own.
He liked his dish better than the teacher's
But he did not say this.
He just rolled his clay into a big ball again
And made a dish like the teacher's.
It was a deep dish.

And pretty soon
The little boy learned to wait
And to watch
And to make things just like the teacher's.
And pretty soon
He didn't make anything of his own anymore.

Then it happened!
That the little boy and his family
Moved to another house
Into another city.
And the little boy
Had to go to another school.

This school was even bigger
Than the other one.
And there was no door from the outside
Into this room.
He had to go up some steps
And walk down a long hall
To get to his room.
And the very first day he was there
The teacher said,
"Today we are going to make a picture".
"Good", thought the little boy
And he waited for the teacher
To tell him what to do.

But the teacher didn't say anything.
She just walked around the room.
When she came to the little boy
She said, "Don't you want to make a picture?"
"Yes", said the little boy
"What are we going to make?"
"I don't know until you make it"
Said the teacher.
"How shall I make it?" said the little boy.
"Why, anyway you like" said the teacher.
"And any colour?" asked the little boy.
"Any colour" said the teacher.
"If everyone made the same picture
And used the same colours,
How could I know who made what
And which was which?"
"I don't know", said the little boy
And he began to make a red
Flower with a green stem.