



ST MONICA'S PRIMARY SCHOOL
MOYNIHAN STREET
EVATT ACT 2617



The Multi-age Classroom



A multi-age class is a class composed of children of **different ages**, intentionally **grouped for learning**. It is **not** a combination class (sometimes called a "composite") where students in each grade study a different curriculum (2 Math classes, 2 Science classes, etc.). The multi-age classroom **is** a place where all students participate in the same units at their own level.

A multi-age classroom is a learning community that addresses the needs of the whole child – **spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual, physical and aesthetic** – and reflects our understandings of how children learn. It provides developmental programs in a natural learning environment where teacher, child and parent are partners in learning.

Multi-age is a deliberate structure in which children of different ages are grouped together. The teacher, as facilitator, uses a variety of instructional strategies to focus on the individual needs of the learner.

The advantages of this structure include: a variety of tasks and groupings, flexibility and teacher consistency.

A multi-age classroom is one that **fosters natural learning, co-operation, diversity and respect in a nurturing environment**. It is a busy community of learners, where individuals take responsibility for their learning. Learning is child-centred, hands-on, co-operative and relevant, catering for individual differences.

The multi-age classroom caters for: independence in learning, interdependence in learning, cross-age relationships, collaborative learning, academic learning and social needs of children.

The multi-age classroom is a supportive environment in which diversity is celebrated, effective social skills are developed, where parents are involved and learners respect the thoughts, experiences and interests of others.

In a multi-age classroom continuous progress is encouraged and works well because every child is unique and has an individual pattern and timing for growth. Such a classroom provides opportunities for children to build progressively on their developing skill and knowledge base as they work toward the Learning Outcomes. There is respect for different learning styles. It is understood that the time it takes for children to reach certain developmental levels is a variable, prompting the elimination of time-based grade-level barriers. Teachers structure a supportive learning environment where children feel successful, develop positive self-concepts,

and are helpful and sensitive to others. Multi-age classes take the focus off meeting the needs of the **whole** group of students and instead meet the needs of each **individual** student. So, unlike many same-age classes where children view their successes by how well they compare to others in their class, each child will learn to focus on his or her personal progress. The multi-age classroom also gives each child an opportunity to associate and work with others on the basis of skills, abilities, interests, personality and age.

Academically, students in a multi-age classroom get to see a wide spectrum of learning as they work with classmates who are at different places in the learning process. Multi-age education emphasises building upon strengths. Students feel they are successful when they are working at their own level and know that everyone should not be able to do the same thing at the same time. Because our teachers value that children as capable learners, they use open-ended activities, tasks and assignment to provide for a wide range of abilities and interests. During this time, the teachers observe and document what each child does and how it is done. Each child is accepted at his or her own place on the developmental learning continuum. The teachers take time to assess, evaluate and plan next steps for each child. In many situations separate subjects are replaced by an integrated curriculum which engages children in meaningful activities that explore concepts and topics relevant and meaningful to the lives of the children. Students are grouped in many different ways and sometime by their own choice.

Socially and emotionally, students develop a sense of caring and nurturing or feeling of family, as they help each other learn. In a classroom where all children are learning at different rates and are not all the same age, there should be little competition. New students joining the class find that they have peers to help them learn where everything is located, how to use materials, and with whom they can share their first experiences at school. The children are expected to make many choices throughout the day as they become independent learners. This allows the teacher to have more time to work productively with individuals, also. Students are often more effective at teaching each other than are teachers teaching students. By helping each other, students reinforce their own understanding of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The informal nature of the classroom encourages much interaction between children and between children and adults. Conversations are encouraged as the children talk through their work in progress. These conversations help them understand just what they have learned. While the students are supporting and assisting each other, real leadership qualities have a chance to emerge.

The multi-age classrooms provide children with greater opportunities for a wider range of relationships and social experiences and therefore promote development of their social skills and cooperative behaviour. The varied levels of social and emotional development found among children of different ages means they can be both supported by and supportive of one another.