

What is multi-age education?

Multi-age education is simply the “little red schoolhouse of old.” Children in more than one grade level learn together in the same classroom. Affording students the opportunity to grow beside people of varying ages allows them to see many perspectives and encourages children to move in and out of the teaching and learning role. The purpose of multi-age grouping is to allow children to develop at their own pace and do so in a nurturing, developmentally appropriate environment. Instruction is learner-centered and children have the unique advantage of continuous learning.

A multi-age setting allows students, parents, and teachers to get to know each other better, as they spend two and sometimes three years learning together. This continued interaction from year to year allows teachers and students to start the year off on the first day with many classroom routines and procedures already established and the veteran students teaching the newer students how things work. Furthermore, when children have the same teacher for an extended period of time, there are less gaps in their conceptual and skill development. The classroom culture grows in amazing ways when kids have time to really get to know each other, as trust among them is enhanced and older children take on roles of ‘protector’ and ‘mentor.’

Multi-age classrooms are highly structured. In order for small groups and independent projects to work effectively, students and teachers must have a set of classroom norms and routines that is followed by everyone.

Benefits for students

- Learner-centered instruction
- Positive, nurturing environment
- Peer support
- Opportunities for leadership
- Individual pace for learning
- Small group instruction
- Longer time with teacher
- Increased self-esteem, confidence

Benefits for parents

- Stronger relationship with teacher

- Child is given appropriate support or challenge, depending on individual achievement level
- Child learns to be pro-social, independent and responsible
- Child learns to self-initiate

Benefits for educators

- Stronger relationship with students and parents
- Better able to address individual student needs
- Longer time to monitor students to recognize effectiveness of teaching
- More stimulating, creative work environment
- More job satisfaction
- - “pushes” teacher to use differentiated instruction and to perform at a high level of teaching
- - fewer discipline problems in class
- - allows staff more options for placement of high maintenance students and/or difficult combinations of students