

MULTI-AGED GROUPING AT HARRISON SCHOOL

Realising that all students are created uniquely, with a wide range of gifts and talents, Harrison School seeks to foster an appreciation of community giftedness and sharing through a multi-aged approach to learning.



We create a learning environment in which children are encouraged to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and respect those of others. At Harrison we strive for self-improvement rather than to compete against each other. The environment is inclusive and individual differences are valued. This is the most natural form of grouping found in families, the workplace and socially. It provides scope for children to select suitably mature peers (academically and socially), to lead, to consolidate learning and seek mentors.

The school has a strong community focus and part of our school's Learning Statement is to ensure that each person's self worth, pride and dignity are enhanced through a supportive atmosphere. We provide experiences that extend and develop the students in our care. The multi-aged class supports our values approach to education.

The Multi-Age structure facilitates flexibility in the way's children are able to learn and grow, through a range of experiences and interactions with other children at various stages of development.

The students are grouped in multi-aged classes for their home class group, thus allowing student interaction to develop and provide for co-operation across the multi-aged classes. This format not only challenges all students but encourages aspects of responsibility and support in the older students.

This multi-age philosophy places each learner at the centre of the considerations of curriculum and classroom practice. Children are able to progress at their own rate without regard for restrictive 'grade' expectations.

As well as seeking to remove arbitrary restriction on children's intellectual development, a primary driving force for the establishment of a multi-age structure is the need for staff to provide greater opportunities for children to develop skills in leadership, to encourage the development of enhanced self esteem and to ensure that each child is both safe and secure in the school setting.

Multi-age classes are child-centred and developmentally based. Children are not restricted in their development of skills and understandings simply by an organisational arrangement. Children coming into our school at the beginning or throughout the school year come from all states and territories and overseas. These children come with a wide variety of educational experiences and from places where the curriculum and organisational structures may be very different to the ACT.

These benefits motivate the use of multi-age classes at our school:

Team Teaching: Multi-age classes consolidate our practice of teachers working in teams as we plan and implement classroom programs. With a larger team involved, we are able to more fully take advantage of the many talents of our team members. Teachers utilise and share their collective skills to cater more specifically for the individual learning needs of our children. The close partnership between teachers allow for interaction between classes, so that children are able to work both formally and informally with an increased number of sympathetic adults. Children benefit from seeing how adults work in teams in the real world of work.

Leadership: Children learn leadership skills through their interaction with both older and younger classmates. Over two years they experience being both the youngest and oldest members of the group. Younger children learn organisational and leadership skills from older ones who express and demonstrate their understandings and lead by example in a co-operative and supportive manner.

Teacher-learner relationships: In the multi-age learning model, teachers develop a thorough knowledge of their students and children develop on-going friendships within and across class groups in their level.

Social relationships: A culture of intolerance often associated with a divisive 'grade' structure is less apparent and is replaced with cooperative friendships in teams and acceptance of diversity. Multi-age classes 'build self-esteem and personal competence' and provide 'opportunities to build social skills in a context more reflective of the social interactions within families and the community'. (Multi -aging in the Early Years, DE&T Victoria 1999)

The learning continuum: Changing the focus of learning from achieving a certain 'grade' to individual personal best alters the nature of the learning process. The continuing, lifelong nature of learning is emphasised, and the emphasis is on the learners rather than on grade requirements. This change in emphasis helps avoid problems that may arise by asking children to do things that are beyond their current developmental levels or risking boredom in students who are ready to move on' (Multi-age and more, Politano, C and Davies, A., 1994).

Real-world connections: The structure of multi-age classes is more akin to family structures and the way the real world operates.

Many local, interstate and overseas schools have adopted multi-age approaches to school structures. The approaches may be different, but the guiding principles remain the same: developmentally appropriate, child-centred, inquiry based and authentic learning programs for today's students, tomorrow's adults.

Further Information:

[Australian Association of Multiage Education: www.australianassociationofmultiageeducation.org](http://www.australianassociationofmultiageeducation.org)