



Multi-Age Classes or Straight Year Levels?

Parents often ask questions about why schools have classes with composite or multi-age year levels (for example, year 5/6 or Year R/1), and wonder how teachers can teach more than one year level effectively.

Research tells us that quality teaching and learning is the key to a successful learning environment in any classroom, regardless of the age or year level of the students involved. It suggests that:

- There is no evidence to support the assumption that student learning may be hindered in multi-grade and multi-age classes.
- Effective teachers concentrate more on what children can do, rather than what they can't do, regardless of the composition of the class
- When older students teach information and skills to their younger peers, their academic performance, and even IQ scores, dramatically improve. (Which is why we have established Cross Aged Tutoring across the school).

There are many reasons for the decision to establish multi-age classes. One practical reason is that schools are staffed on the basis of one teacher for every 26 junior primary students, and one teacher for every 30 primary students. Students do not enrol in neat packages of 26 or 30, just as they do not enrol in equal numbers of male and female.

Year levels only indicate the length of time that a student has spent at school. They do not indicate the level of skills, knowledge and understandings. Every child is an individual and, in their everyday lives, they interact with people of all ages, enriching their lives and developing relationships. Multi-age grouping is a natural extension of this into the classroom environment.

In planning for any class, whether single year level or multi-age, teachers take into consideration the strengths, prior knowledge and needs of every student relative to the learning they are planning to introduce. They use this as a starting point to design the learning and work from where each child is currently at. In any class there will be learning happening as a whole class, in small groups and as individuals.

You may find it useful to refer to some internet links for further information:

The South Australian Teaching for Effective Learning Framework provides the DECD position on pedagogy. It can be found at <http://www.learningtolearn.sa.edu.au/tfel/>

A YouTube clip by Ken Robinson focusing on changing education paradigms
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcdGpL4U>