Mixed-Aged Grouping

Children in all cultures learn from one another, they imitate, instruct, direct, follow, interrogate, and respond to one another's knowledge, ideas and feelings. (Whiting, 1973, Pratt, 1983, Whiting and Edwards, 1988)

1. Mixed-Age grouping resembles family and neighborhood grouping. Mixed-Age groups make possible the socialization and education provided only through family settings.

2. Research indicates that social development is enhanced by experiences available in mixed-age grouping. Leadership and pro-social behaviors have been found to flourish in this environment.

3. Children in groups that are similar but not identical stimulate each other's thinking and cognitive growth.

4. Research shows that interaction between “novices” and “experts” benefits all individuals both academically and socially.

5. Mixed-age grouping relaxes the rigid expectations of same-age curriculums.

6. Mixed-age grouping has been successfully used in the United States and abroad. (Katz, Evangelou & Hartman, 1990, v.)

Multiage is not a combination classroom. The mixed-age grouping, by definition, is created deliberately for the benefit of the children. Usually a mixed-age group of children stays with the same teacher for several years. Such a group is formed to “optimize” what can be learned when children of different—as well as the same ages and abilities have opportunities to interact (Katz, Evangelou & Allison Hartman, 1990, p.1.) Multiage classrooms often have an age span of three years rather than two, providing greater opportunities for cross-age learning, (Stone & Christie, 1996).

Schools and child care centers are increasingly replacing families and neighborhoods. Smaller family size and out-of-home employment are factors causing children to spend most of their time in schools and centers. Sibling-like relationships can be fostered and become a source of affection, comfort and closeness for all children involved. The students become a “family of learners” who benefit from collaboration. Younger and older children benefit from different
points of view. Pro-social behaviors result from helping one another, sharing and taking turns (Stone, 1998). Pro-social behaviors are often treated as indexes of social competence. When older children in a mixed-age classroom are encouraged to remind younger ones to the rules, their own self-regulation may be enhanced. (Katz, Evangelou, Hartman, 1990)

Here at Moorpark College Child Development Center and in a developmentally appropriate program the teachers use process-orientated activities as part of their teaching strategy. These activities meet the needs of children at all age levels because they are open-ended, allowing the children to discover at their own pace, increasing knowledge as they feel comfortable and as awareness grows. Children are individually encouraged and supported to progress at their own speed. Learning opportunities are challenging but age appropriate. This is how children learn best. The classroom is carefully planned to encourage experimenting and m own level of abilities. Both autonomous and cooperative learning is the result. Whole group activities are shared experiences and small group activities focus more on individual needs. (Stone, 1998) Children experience individual, small and whole group activities here at Moorpark.

Mixed-age grouping is also referred to as: vertical grouping and in primary school, ungraded or nongraded classes. Learning is structured over several years, which enables the teacher to see children as individuals and to use instructional strategies to accommodate each child’s needs. The wide range of competencies in a mixed-age group offers opportunities for children to develop relationships and friendships with others who match, compliment, or supplement their own needs and styles. A wide range of competencies gives rise to cognitive conflicts and opportunities to lead, instruct, nurture and strengthen skills and knowledge. Other-age children allow children of diverse ages to interact. Research indicates greater potential for social and intellectual benefits.

Extensive research has resulted in the recommendation of implementing mixed-aged grouping in classrooms serving young children by researchers such as: Sandra J. Stone, Lilian G. Katz, Demetra Evangelou and Jeanette A. Hartman. The mixture of ages may increase teachers’ awareness of developmental discrepancies within a particular child. Supportive social contexts create new levels of competence in mixed-age groups and ranges of competence offer varying degrees of cognitive support. (Katz, Evangelou & Hartman, 1990)

References:
Ages 7 - 10, 10(3).