

Collaborative Education: Understanding the Benefits of Mixed-Age Grouping for Infants and Toddlers

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BENEFITS OF MIXED-AGE GROUPING

Mixed-age grouping is more natural and family-like. In this dynamic, children can experience being the youngest or oldest children in the classroom while building sustained relationships. Children experience a diversity of experiences and learn how to care and empathize for others. In a mixed-age classroom, the children are at various developmental levels so their needs are different and teachers are not overwhelmed by meeting the same kinds of needs for all children. There is less competition between children due to a mixture of ability levels and lower staff to child ratios allow for more individual attention.

How are relationships affected in a mixed-age classroom?

- Mixed-age grouping supports relationships between same age peers
- Between older and younger children
- Between teachers and children
- Between the entire classroom community

Relationships Between the Classroom Community



The children in the picture above are pretending to have a picnic and each child is at a different developmental level.

BENEFITS FOR OLDER TODDLERS

- Provides more occasions to take on a leadership role
- Allows them more opportunities to teach or explain
- Opportunity to take on the role of caregiver
- Greater self-esteem from helping younger children
- Scaffold for younger children
- Teaches them appropriate ways to meet younger children's needs
- Help younger children learn classroom rules
- Chance to model pro-social behavior to younger children

Scaffolding for Younger Peers



The older toddler in this picture is reading a book to two infants and propped books in front of them to read as well..

Understanding the Work of Older Peers



BENEFITS FOR YOUNGER TODDLERS

- Try to understand the work that older children do
- Learn how to be nurturing and helpful because it is modeled by older children
- Participate in more complex activities they may not have initiated themselves
- Strengthen communication, literacy, and verbal skills because of exposure to older peers
- Exposed to more mature problem solving lets them try new ways to problem solve
- Learn that their needs cannot always be met immediately
- Learn how to be successful while accepting their limit

Opportunity to Nurture



TEACHERS PERSPECTIVE

In a mixed age setting, children are able to spend three years with the same teacher instead of changing classrooms. This helps with a child's learning with deeper understanding of their strengths and needs. The older children get an opportunity to be leaders and scaffold learning for the younger ones. This supports the younger children in learning sophisticated approaches modeled by their older peers and challenges their problem solving skills. The classroom community becomes a family of learners who support and care for each other rather than competing.

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