

## The Benefits of a Multi Age Classroom

Dr. Montessori believed that observation plus imitation equals learning. In a Montessori classroom, as children “move” through work they are exposed to older and younger peers - interacting, modeling, engaging, and working at an individual’s pace.

The elements of a multi age classroom exist inherently in the world beyond the classroom. We all learn from the experiences of others. We see it in the community, in home life with sibling interaction. At school it reflects “real life scenarios”. At the college/university level the environment can range from 18-45(and on). In a conversation about literature (for example) it is enlightening to hear from different perspectives from all ages.

When there is a well functioning multi age classroom it can adapt to the needs of each individual, providing and promoting academic and social enrichment. It “fills in the gaps” by nurturing strengths and challenges. Teachers and students work together throughout the year to build a community that can focus on each individual’s (younger and older) worth and natural strengths.

Our teachers at Children’s Garden are excited about the multiage classroom because they understand the intentionality of combining ages. There are multiple teachers in the classroom observing, instructing, and monitoring. Teachers collaborate to prepare the environment with materials from simple to complex. Teachers blend and weave materials and lessons (individual and whole group) for multiple ages.

As teachers present and model lessons/works, children watch and imitate. The children not only need their teachers, they need their peers. Children can “eavesdrop” on more advanced lessons being given by a teacher to another, possibly older, student. Children can then become interested in new concepts by watching, listening, and actively learning from others. “The child suddenly becomes aware of his or her companions, and is almost as deeply interested as we, (teachers/parents) are in the progress of their work.” -Maria Montessori

A younger child might have less understanding of expectations, process, and concepts. They begin the school year as an observer, following the older children’s lead. Mid year as they mature with their confidence and skills they can become a model, a leader. The benefits for older students are the reinforcement and sharpening of skills and understanding of content. “To know is to truly teach someone else”, essentially building leadership and confidence through peer

interaction. The self-regulating benefits older children when they model behavior and skills. In this multi age environment children engage in and initiate a range of work, which ultimately benefits each as an individual.

*Claire Jackson*