

How can teachers evaluate children's progress in classes that are family-grouped?

Just as each child learns and develops at an individual rate, so current evaluation practices are based on individual assessment of each child's progress. Today's evaluation procedures measure a child's attainment against previous attainments - not against the attainment of other children.

The aim of evaluation is to diagnose present interests, abilities and levels of development, to measure progress towards desired goals and to gauge the effectiveness of the teacher's program in facilitating experiences which promote growth.

(C.O.P.E. report P.25)

Teachers will keep records of each child's progress in both learning skill development and growth toward maturity. Records of individual achievement in reading, maths and spelling are a vital part of the evaluation process. But the important happenings in a child's social life should also be noted.

Teachers should look at such things as what has been learned, what children can do, how much better they can do it now than before, what children know, what this knowledge means to them and what they need to learn next.

(Children and Language: A School is a Language Place, p. 25)

Class records of stories, poems, class or group interest, science and social science topics - all of these will be noted and referred to as teachers plan their learning programs. In this way, teachers can avoid repetition while still building on what has already been learned.

What does C.O.P.E. say about family grouping?

Whole-school organisation is now reflecting the knowledge that schools are places where pupils should be known as individuals by more than one teacher and their immediate classmates. Teachers know that language and social and moral development are not best served when pupils spend almost all their school lives in contact with only those of their own age. They know, further, that educational development is continuous and incremental and should not be disrupted by artificial and physical breaks such as those between infants and primary and primary and secondary schools. Such beliefs have led to what is known as family or vertical groups in schools where children of mixed age and ability are placed together.

(Primary Education
in Tasmania -
C.O.P.E. report,
1980, p. 34)

998 - 82 Education Department Tasmania
Distributed by: Early Education Reform Group
P.O. Box 477, Ashgrove 4060



FAMILY GROUPING

Together
ness
leads to
co-operation
and growth

What is family grouping?

Organising children of different age levels into the one class group is known as family grouping. Most children live, work and play with children of mixed ages within their own families. Family grouping brings the advantages of family living into the classroom, offers children a wider variety of friendships and role-models, and greatly enhances their learning environment.



Why group children this way?

- End-of-year transfers from one class to another can cause disruptions to learning and problems of adjustment. With family grouping, children transfer less frequently, so these problems are minimised.
- Only a small group of children transfer from each class at the end of each year, so teachers can give these children more individual attention. Children can begin working at their own level immediately.
- Children are not expected to repeat grades.

- Bright younger children can go ahead at their own pace, often being taught with an older group but still having the company of young children at other times.
- Mixed-age grouping allows the formation of classes of even sizes. Otherwise, unevenly balanced age groups can mean large classes at one level and small classes at another.
- Children with special needs and those who have learning difficulties in certain areas have the advantage of a wider selection of learning materials being available in the classroom.

What are the educational aims of family grouping?

- Promote the development of the *whole* child
 - Create an environment for co-operative learning based on a recognition of each child's uniqueness and unique rate of development.
 - Encourage responsibility in children.
 - Encourage investigation, the pursuit of children's interests and self-help leading to independent learning.
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- Children make valuable contacts across the age range as they learn to work and play together, to tolerate and co-operate. Older children learn to help younger children and all make a valuable contribution to life in the classroom by being responsible, not only for equipment, but to a certain extent for each other as well.
 - Family grouping provides an environment which encourages growth. Traditional grouping tends to regard all children in an age group as having reached the same level of development. Within a family-type structure, however, teachers are more likely to treat children as individuals.