

Multiage Review 2005

The Story so far...

As part of the School Strategic Renewal Plan 2004-2006, a review of the Multiage structures at St Luke's was placed on the agenda for 2005. The staff indicated an enthusiastic desire to review what they were doing within their Hubs and Teacher Teams and the parent community responded in good numbers to a written survey. To assist with this process, Ms Michelle Young, the Curriculum Support Officer from BCEC and the Curriculum Support Teacher, Mrs Merridy Rokobaro were enlisted to work with staff and to prepare for a meeting with the whole community. It is the purpose of this discussion paper to summarise the conversation to date.

What the staff said.....

- About the nurturing climate of the multi-age classroom

Teachers noted that the multi-age learning groups, structured as they are presently in Hubs comprising two traditional year levels (2/3,4/5,6/7) resulted in an "accepting climate where co-operation is more valued than competition". They noted the nurturing of older children towards younger students newly arrived in the group and that peer tutoring which resulted enhanced the climate. The nurturing climate was also enhanced by the teacher working with students for two years, sometimes for three.

Teachers noted "less traumatic transitions from group to group" partly due to the fact that at least part of the group were familiar with routines and able to offer support to new members. They also noted enhanced relationships with students and their families at least partly due to working with children for two years.

Teachers believe that this extended time with students also allows them to provide learning experiences to better meet the individual needs of students, that children are therefore able to achieve success at their own level, and that the extended period in the group allows more opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning achievements.

- About the Teacher Teams/Hubs

Teachers noted that the Teacher Teams were supportive of curriculum change, allowing planning and delivery of curriculum to be shared within the team. The teams also allowed teachers to get to know children across the Hub whilst allowing the children to get to know the teachers in the team as well.

- About learning group size

Small class size was recognised as crucial in the multi-age structure, as it is in any learning context.



What the parents said....

- ✓ About the culture of the multi-age classroom

Parents noted that the older students passed on "learning skills" to the younger students and that the next year the younger students were able to experience this. Parents also noted that children were "able to mix with other age levels". Some parents noted that there was a "greater sense of responsibility" and that students were able to "work at their own pace" either extending or consolidating necessary skills. Parents noted that teachers were caring, supportive, encouraging and able to build "longer term relationships" by working with students over two years.

- ✓ About Teacher Teams/Hubs

Parents noted that groupings across the Hubs allowed students to get to know other students and teachers and that this is a "positive challenge". They noted that when a student is "kept down", it isn't "as noticeable".

- ✓ About learning group size

Parents noted that our smaller learning group sizes allowed for easier monitoring.

- ✓ Other positive observations

Students are encouraged to develop time/management skills, especially in the older groups. In the Yr6/7 Hub, the leadership focus across the Hub allowed more time for leadership skills to be developed. Some parents welcomed the "cocooning" of our Yr 1 students prior to them joining the Yr2/3 Hub.

Parents noted that the interaction of students in the playground was positive.

Parents reported positive feedback from former students who claimed to have benefited from our multi-age structures and that we need to sell what we do better.

What the future might look like

The staff said:

- We need to articulate a philosophy of multi-age teaching and learning as it occurs here at St Luke's.
- We need to do a literature search to discover the latest research in Multi-age teaching and learning
- We need to link into quality In-service for staff for development and support purposes
- We need to consider more flexible learning groups, both across and within the Hubs which are responsive to the needs of our students
- We need to consider re-naming our Hubs to de-emphasise traditional grade levels
- We need to acknowledge and work with issues of space, class sizes, building constraints and resources.
- We need to consider the impact of the Preparatory Year on our current structures

The parents said:

We need to know more about.....

- Whether every child will grow and develop in multi-age structures
- How children are assessed, and how teachers keep track of their progress
- Whether the children like multi-age groups
- How children in multi-age groups compare with others with their academic achievement and their integration into secondary school
- Whether teachers still manage to spend time with those who struggle and with those who may be gifted
- How outcome levels work and when children can be expected to reach them

- How older, more able students, are challenged when working with younger less able students
- How multi-age teaching is defined – what is its philosophy
- How learning groups are put together – are interests, abilities, behaviour, gender factors in these decisions? Are there other factors?
- Why teachers group students across Hubs for some subjects and not others
- Why other Catholic schools don't use multi-age structures
- How multi-age learning groups differ from composite classes
- Do children become unsettled towards the end of the 2nd year in the learning group?

We have concerns about.....

- Older students dominating younger ones
- Children doing the same work for two years
- Children being stretched, challenged
- The effect on older children working with younger students
- Large class sizes (6/7), limited resources, timetable constraints
- The challenge for Specialist Teachers working with students of differing age and ability levels
- Whether our students are learning what they ought at each year level
- How children cope if they need to repeat
- How new concepts are reinforced when children are at different levels
- Whether students lacking self-motivation get lost in the system
- Whether students working with different teachers may be a negative experience for both
- How parents can be involved in decisions which affect their children

Recommendations

During the Multi-age Review Parent Evening held on October 26, 2005, many of the questions raised above were addressed by staff and guest speakers. From this evening the following recommendations emerged

- ✓ **To retain small classes to enhance the positive benefits of the Hub structure**
- ✓ **To allow flexibility of learning groups within the Hub structure to meet the needs of particular groups of students best**
- ✓ **To develop a plain English report to provide information for parents on student progress**
- ✓ **To develop a multi-age plan for each Hub showing how Key Learning Areas are taught**
- ✓ **To articulate the multi-age philosophy at St Luke's**
- ✓ **To provide adult education opportunities for parents about Outcomes learning**
- ✓ **To target professional development for staff to multi-age teaching and learning**

Strengths to Celebrate

During the course of this evening, participants were invited to celebrate the characteristics of their children learning in our teaching hubs. They spoke about:

- ✓ **The community spirit at St Luke's**
- ✓ **The "confident communicators" amongst our students**
- ✓ **The flexibility in our learning groups, meeting diverse and individual needs**
- ✓ **The self control and consideration for others**
- ✓ **The positive family and peer interactions**
- ✓ **The positive relationships within the community**
- ✓ **The co-operative learning strategies encouraged in our learning groups**
- ✓ **The risk-taking and resilience of our learners**

There is much to celebrate and there is plenty still to do.