

ABSTRACT

Examining Play Among Young Children in Single-age and Multi-age Preschool Classroom Settings

by

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Advocates for multi-age classrooms claim multi-age groupings benefit children (Brynes, Shuster, & Jones, 1994). Currently, there is a lack of research examining play among students in multi-age classrooms. If indeed there is a positive benefit of play among children, research is needed to examine these behaviors among and between young children in single-age and multi-age classrooms. The purpose of this study was to determine if young children benefit from increased play opportunities.

This qualitative study utilized observations, interviews, and questionnaires to gather data from teachers, parents, and children regarding play interactions in both single-age and multi-age classrooms. The intent of this study was to provide a rationale for why multi-age programs should be developed or continued. Participants in this study included teachers and parents who completed questionnaires and children who participated in video taped observations and interviews. This study took place in a fully inclusive early childhood center. Observations of the play engagements of children were video taped in

both the indoor and outdoor sandbox settings. During the five weeks of video taping, 281 play segments were recorded resulting in 1549 occurrences of play.

Based on the play observations, it appeared that young children in multi-age classrooms engaged in more than one type of play more frequently than young children in single-age classrooms. Further, young children in multi-age classrooms initiated play more frequently. However, typically developing young children in multi-age classrooms did not initiate play with young children with disabilities more frequently than typically developing young children in single-age classrooms. The interviews with children indicated that young children were aware of their own play interactions. Based on the data collected from the questionnaires of teachers and parents, it appeared these two groups had similar views of the value of play and believed it to be developmentally appropriate and a critical learning process.

Professionals in the field of early childhood education should consider the results of this study when designing, developing, and implementing single and multi-age programs for young children with and without disabilities. Moreover, professionals should consider the impact of play on the development of young children when designing curricula.