

A Multi-Age Team Teaching Program

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SUCCESS in an ungraded summer program caused three elementary teachers to become interested in the relationship of self-concept to academic achievement. This interest inspired them to initiate a multi-age teaching program as another means of individualizing instruction.

Once their idea was accepted by a supportive administration, the three teachers began to survey research and existing programs. They studied various aspects of team teaching, flexible programs, and individualized instruction. By the spring of 1969 a unique three-year pilot program, Multi-Age Grouping To Individualize Instruction (MAGI), was proposed and approved by the total faculty of the P. K. Yonge Laboratory School, University of Florida. This program



Individual strengths are used in a helping relationship with others.

was consistent with the school's values, beliefs, and goals.

The MAGI Program

In September 1969, 90 children were randomly selected from the 180 children who were in third, fourth, and fifth grades. These children were placed in three adjoining but separate classrooms. Approximately ten 8-year-olds, ten 9-year-olds, and ten 10-year-olds were under the guidance of each of the team teachers.

The research design called for gathering data through systematic observation by the teachers, student and parent evaluations, and application of various objective measurement devices. Data were sought relative to positive or negative change in self-concept; interactions among children within each of the three groups, and between children from different groups; academic growth; and teacher attitudes toward the cooperative planning required by the nature of the program.

The school's goals for its students and faculty serve as a framework for the MAGI teaching team in planning for individualized instruction and in making appropriate pro-

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MAGI teachers help each person develop a positive self-concept.

visions for evaluation. Central among these goals are the following:

1. That each person develops increasingly positive perceptions of himself
2. That each person not only uses personal competencies to help teach someone else, but knows that he can learn from someone else to become an effective lifelong learner
3. That each person accept increasing responsibility for his own behavior and learning.

The classrooms of the MAGI group are not new and thus do not have air conditioning, carpeting, movable partitions, and other physical assets which usually contribute to good team effort. Yet children and activities spill out of the classrooms into closets, offices, walkways, patios, and under the trees for learning experiences. Furniture and instructional equipment and supplies are moved about freely to accommodate a flexible program.

Instructional materials in each room

provide for interests and needs of children ranging through at least six learning levels. All learning resources from the three classrooms are pooled, shared, and used by individual children or groups of children with common interests and needs as they pursue learning.

Interest centers located in each room stimulate children to handle, question, explore, and pursue. They serve as a catalyst to send children on intellectual adventures.

Teacher's Role

The teacher's role in MAGI is many-faceted. His first responsibility is to guide and facilitate the learning experiences of each of the 30 children whose home base is in his classroom. Constant diagnosis of learning and social needs provides the basis for prescription. Informal diagnostic tests, conferences with students and parents, plus teacher observations are used. Prescription must be consistent with the goal that each learning experience enhances the student's perception of himself and contributes to his learning experiences. Each child proceeds at his own pace. As he finishes a prescribed program, he and his teacher evaluate his achievement in relation to his goals and plan his next steps.

Each child is accepted where he is, and his individual strengths are used in a helping relationship with another child or group of children, as a means of enhancing his self-concept. For example, John is 10 years old



Parents interest themselves in the child's learning.



Interest centers stimulate students to handle, question, explore, and pursue.

and is reading on an academic second grade level, but he has great physical coordination and skill. Bill is younger but performs on a high academic level. By placing the same value on these strengths, both boys benefit in a helping relationship in which each helps the other. The teacher continually seeks to help each child to feel worthy and find happiness.

A second teacher responsibility is to plan cooperatively with other members of the team and special area teachers flexible group activities for 90 children in art, music, and physical education. The special teachers in these areas work closely with the MAGI teachers to provide opportunity for individual endeavor and large and small group activities.

One of the most exciting aspects of large group activities is planned time, when 90 children crowd into one room to share dramatizations. These dramatizations are an outgrowth of the reading experiences which are shared in the three home bases during the week. Any group of children who wish to characterize a story they have read may do so at that time. Spontaneous acting is encouraged; store-bought props and memorized lines are discouraged.

Each of three MAGI teachers instructs in all subject areas. However, when diagnosis reveals that a certain number of the 90 children need special skills in certain areas, the teachers cooperatively plan a time for setting up different skill groups. For example, in the area of reading, there might be a special group in phonics, another for

word analysis, a third directed at improving comprehension at the same time.

The team members utilize their own greatest strengths by teaching groups whose needs match their special competencies. Teachers share their concerns for all children in their group and share evaluations. Children not in skill groups work independently in other areas of the room.

Another kind of grouping is built upon pupils' special interests and hobbies. One teacher may be helping a group of boys and girls to knit, another may be teaching a foreign language, while another may help a group make books, tape stories, or prepare a film for the library.

Mini-groups are set up for pursuit of very specific goals for short periods of time. These are often taught by older students from the senior high school or the middle school, by parents, or by other members of the community.

Finally, each team teacher has responsibility for providing a flexible program where children have the opportunity during each day to plan their own schedules, check their work, help friends and be helped, visit other groups, and file samples of their activities to be evaluated with their teachers and shared with parents.



Children have opportunities to help friends and be helped.



Instructional materials meet needs of pupils at different learning levels.

Peaks and Pitfalls

At the end of two years of the MAGI program, extensive data have been collected focusing on self-concept, helping relationships, academic achievement, and attitudes of parents, teachers, and students toward the MAGI program. In its third year, the MAGI program will continue to build on the strengths of the first two years. There will be much more parent involvement, more flexibility between home base groups as chil-

dren's interests are expanded into an integrated day.

The MAGI program does not always paint a rosy picture. Many frustrations beset the team. There is too little built-in planning time and a lack of full-time teacher aides. There is frustration in knowing that evaluations can never adequately report the mass of pertinent information about students that is stowed away in each teacher's head and heart.

The team feels there are two keys to the success of the MAGI program. First, the three teachers feel an increasingly closer relationship as they have sharpened their communication skills with one another, as they have shared joys, traumas, and sorrows as they involve themselves with the lives of 90 children.

The second key to success is the continued support of the administration. P. K. Yonge Director J. B. Hodges has stated that the most important outcome of the MAGI program is "staff development"! Although he said it in jest, team members think he is right because teacher growth and happiness are reflected also in children's eyes. □



Mini-groups pursue specific goals for short periods of time.

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