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## **Teaching Children**

By Gail Hunt

Two very positive experiences teaching quilting to children are described briefly here.

The first was an 8-week course which was one of the offerings of my ongoing Children's Sewing classes. It was designed for adults and children to take together, so they learn as a team. Since the five adults were non-quilters to begin with, we decided to do a small sampler as the adult project, and the children decided on a four-patch, with lots of variations. (The other choice was the rail fence.)

During the first 2-hour class, the children designed blocks with crayons and pre-drawn paper shapes, while at a nearby table, the adults discussed the materials, equipment and template-making. Then together we talked about definitions and the process of quilting.

Some of the 7 – 12 year old children had taken sewing classes with me before, so I encouraged them to make their quilts on the machine. The others were more comfortable patching by hand. Most of the completed quilts had a combination of machine and handwork though.

During the 8 weeks, we remained very flexible about procedures. One of my teaching goals was for each person to produce a unique project in a size that she was comfortable with. Most of the children produced doll-sized quilts, and most of the adults made 6-block samplers. Paper pieced hearts made their way into most of the children's quilts – this is a technique that really thrilled them.

I particularly enjoyed watching the relationship between the parent and the child. From a teaching point of view, more of the responsibility for repeating instructions fell to the parent (and sometimes the child helped the parent with the technique, too), and so my job was made easier in that the children weren't constantly asked me for guidance. We were all resource persons, and that was relaxing.

At this writing, I have still be unable to get this or any of my children's sewing courses accepted into continuing education curriculum, where the sewing machines are available, because continuing education only offers classes to

adults. Perhaps in your area you might have more success with similar proposal. For the past three years, I have offered the classes at my home, and have 5 – 6 good basic machines for the children to use, which I have scouted out at garage sales for #25 – 30 each. Advertising has been done through the local school newsletters and the courses have proven consistently popular.

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The other experience I'd like to share with you is a voluntary one. I undertook teaching a grade 5/6 class of 26 children to make a baby quilt for one of their two teachers. The children made all the decisions about color and design. After I showed them lots of examples of quilts that I thought a disparate group of non-sewers could handle, I provided all the requirements, materials and came into the classroom to teach on 6 – 8 separate occasions, to the students and 2 – 3 volunteer parents who guided them in a smaller group.

The children chose to paper-piece 2 or 3 tumbling blocks each, in a bright rainbow colors, then they combined them into a triangular centre on a purple background, with more blocks individually appliquéd onto a bright yellow border. Almost all the hand-sewing was done by students, while I applied the borders and binding by machine. We all tied the quilt layers together, in groups of 6 at a time. The children all signed the border very subtly with a Pigma pen. The finished quilt was a beautiful credit to the abilities of children, both in the area of design and sewing. The recipient was deeply touched and the whole school seemed to be impressed by the finished work.

If anyone wishes to learn more about these children's quilting experiences, please feel free to call or write.

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