

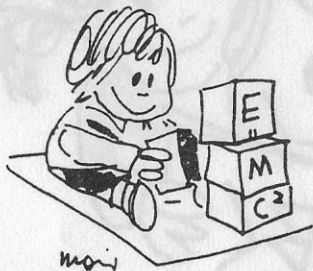
C: Intellectual Development, which includes language, concentration, decision-making, problem-solving.

Children must be able to listen, to understand, to remember and then to act appropriately - should be able to express themselves adequately and for this they need a certain vocabulary and the ability to organise their ideas into simple, correct sentences - must be able to listen well enough to distinguish differences between words like 'peach' and 'beach', 'shop' and 'chop' - need to articulate words clearly so that others will understand - should be thoroughly familiar with books, able to turn pages correctly, realise that what is said may be written down and read back again, know the difference between a 'letter' and a 'word', know that our printing runs from left to right (directionality again?!) and from top of page to the bottom.

Conclusion:

Although children's ages in First Grade generally range from 5 years to 6 years, we must remember that **developmentally** their levels range from about 3 and a half to 7 and a half years, because each individual child develops at his own unique rate. Boys generally are about 6 months behind girls in developing, which makes many of them extra vulnerable.

In order to give each child the maximum chance of having a happy successful time at school, the Early Education Reform Group campaigns for a child-centred, flexible, ungraded system in the early school years. The needs and interests and present abilities of each child would be taken into full account, and appropriate programmes planned. Children would progress at their own pace, success would be there for all, and learning would be fun.

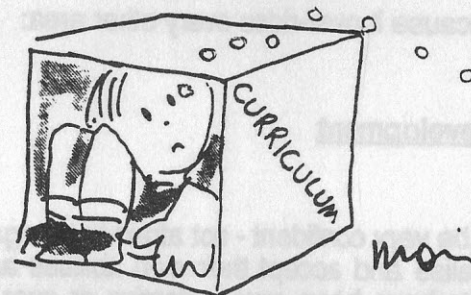


Lil Gwyther E.E.R.G.

(This article has been adapted from one written for SPELD many years ago - it's still the same old story!)

Coming Ready Or Not !!

That's the cry from the old game of "Hide and Seek", and sometimes I think we should use it in the game of "Off to School". But ah! there's a catch! For the children who are not ready the latter game very quickly ceases to be fun, and they would rather not play. Indeed, in their efforts to avoid it, some even develop tummy-aches or head-aches, and are often taken to the doctor to see what is wrong.



The Early Education Reform Group would like to see the question so often asked, "Is my child ready for school?" changed into "Is the school ready for my child?" But because we know that the answer to the latter just has to be "No" in many cases, we present for your information some relevant points.

The compulsory age for children to enter school is not 5 years as many people still think - it is "not before 6" as stated in the Education Act. It is true that children may enter in January if they have turned 5 by 31st December, but it is not compulsory to enter unless the child has turned 6 by the time school starts. This means children can be aged anywhere between 5 and 6 years 11 months entering school, and all quite legal.

When we consider that children in many overseas countries cannot start school before 7, surely we must question the wisdom of allowing children to enter at 5. Many children do "cope" with the situation without any visible trouble, but one must wonder how much creativity is stifled, and how many potential leaders are lost because of the intense effort required to master the work.

And of course there are thousands of children who find school a continual struggle, instead of the happy, natural place it should be. Those who find the going hard in Year 1 are often promoted to Year 2, where the struggle usually becomes harder, and before long all the natural love and zest for learning may be destroyed. Some children fail to be promoted, and may suffer all the damage which failure can cause - confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, negative feelings towards school, and, frequently, behavioural problems.

Why does all this happen? The major reason is simply this: many children have not yet developed sufficiently in one or more areas to manage comfortably what the traditional school requires of them. We shall now look at what are considered desirable levels of development in the areas which strongly affect school performance. This may help parents when making decisions about school entry.

First, and most important because it over-rides every other area:

A: Social and emotional development

Emotional: Children should be very confident - not afraid to try again if they fail a task - should realise and accept their own abilities and limitations (difficult to achieve if parents have been over-protective or over ambitious!) - should freely take part in expressive and creative activities such as talking in front of a group, singing, dancing, etc - should show initiative, and work and play independently - should be able to concentrate long enough to finish a given task (different from concentrating on their own choice) - should not be easily distracted - should not be disturbed by unexpected happenings - should not lose temper or cry too easily.

Comenius said: "Let the first foundation of all things be thoroughly laid, unless you wish the whole superstructure to totter".

(from *Child Education*)

Social: Should be able to play happily with a group of children - relate easily to adults - share and take turns - keep simple games rules - lose without being upset - should not interrupt teacher or other children too often - should be able to keep quiet and listen.

B: Physical Development

Large muscle skills: Children need to be very strong and healthy as the effort to sit still is very tiring - at this stage of growth every instinct is for fairly constant movement. They need a certain skill in running, jumping, climbing, throwing and catching in order to hold their own with other children. If they are excluded from group play confidence rapidly evaporates, affecting every area of schooling.

Small muscle skills: Distinguishing differences in colour, size, shape, direction - (JOHN - WHOJ S-2) ability to manipulate pencil in required manner (many children cannot do that at 6 let alone 5) - ability to concentrate on and follow a line of print (there are cases of myopia caused by too early schooling).

In intersensory research Birch and Lefford reported that "full effectiveness in the integration of vision, touch, and certain muscle co-ordination is not reached until 7-8 years of age".

