CHILDREN TODAY AND HOW THEY LEARN
A Handbook for Parents Working with Children in Schools

A project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education
With a specialization in Early Childhood
Department of Psychological Foundations

by
Norene M. Charnofsky

December, 1973
The thesis of Norene M. Charnofsky is approved:

California State University, Northridge
December, 1973
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANDBOOK</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in Our Schools and Our Society</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ways That Children Are Alike</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences Among Children</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

CHILDREN TODAY AND HOW THEY LEARN

A Handbook for Parents Working

with Children in Schools

by

Norene M. Charnofsky

Master of Arts in Education

December, 1973

This handbook has been written to be used as preparatory background for parents working with children in early childhood education programs, pre-kindergarten programs and adult education child-observation classes.

Noted are recent changes in our schools and our society which are seen to increase the probability that greater numbers of parents than in the past will be participating in the educational process.

The handbook presents for the parent, in non-technical language, a philosophy of education which views development as the major aim of education. The child's interaction with his environment is seen as the process by which his mental powers develop.

It is hoped that parents will feel more comfortable in the school setting and will be more effective in the educational process (at home
and at school) if they understand how children are similar and what individual differences there might be among the children they are helping to learn.

The similarities noted are the basic needs, the progression through stages of development and the need to learn.

The individual differences explained to parents are pace and timing, interests, temperament, learning styles and strengths.

The handbook concludes with questions and answers related to child growth, development and learning.

The idea for this handbook and its content developed as the result of varied experiences.

As a kindergarten teacher in a suburban middle class community, I was in close contact with my pupils' mothers. Some I saw nearly every day, and many informal "at the gate" conversations were held during the course of the school year. I became aware that mothers were concerned about various aspects of their children's development and education.

Later, in a field work assignment in the Master of Arts program, where I helped to initiate and coordinate a pre-school and parent education class for mothers and their young children in an economically impoverished area in San Fernando, I realized that mothers were concerned with the same basic questions about their children's education.

Still later, working as a parent-education teacher in a lower middle class community, I heard the same kinds of concerns expressed. I tried to locate a book or pamphlet presenting my viewpoint on child
growth and development, but could find none I thought "to the point." Querying more experienced parent-education teachers, I learned they would welcome the development of such a handbook for use by their students (mothers of pre-school children).

I began collecting questions systematically, noting the concerns which appeared with great regularity.

Finally, as a member of an elementary school advisory council in an affluent middle class community, I heard many of the same questions and misconceptions expressed by both parents and teachers.

As I began writing this handbook, I kept "trying out" the ideas with my parent-education students, mothers enrolled in my class. I presented small parts to them for their reaction, as a check that the concepts were clearly explained. I thought of these women while writing, aiming the content for them and for the many other parents who may be entering into our public school activities as a result of SB 1302 programs.

While the handbook is planned as an instrument for use by parent-education teachers and others who work with parents, it is expected that the content has been presented simply and clearly enough so that parents who can and do read can gain meaning from using it independently.

In each of my experiences in working with adults, I have noted the common need for information and examples in the broad area of understanding of the young child's needs. Parents and teachers need to become aware, consciously, of their goals for the young child, based on his needs. Most often, there is a lack of awareness of the
distinction between fostering the growth of the intellect and pressuring for early performance of academic skills.

It is my hope that the use of this handbook will contribute toward establishing a more sensitive and humane classroom atmosphere, more suited to the verve and vitality of young children, than has prevailed in the past.

I also hope that it will help make parents feel more "at home" in school, and that parent-education teachers will find it a helpful supplement to their classes.
CHILDREN TODAY AND HOW THEY LEARN

Dear Parents:

Welcome back to school!

You are one of a growing number of parents who feel that their active participation in school can help strengthen their youngsters' education. Your participation in the parent-education child observation program, the pre-kindergarten program or the early childhood education program indicates your real concern for your child's welfare. You are committing your time and energy directly to aiding him, just as you have done in the years before he began going to school.

This handbook is written to help you feel more comfortable in your child's school, and to help you be more effective in the educational process. It is hoped that, prepared with some basic understandings, you will find the time spent in school not only worthwhile for the child, but interesting and enjoyable for you as well.

Changes in Our Schools and Our Society

If you haven't been in a school for young children since you yourself were a pupil in one, you are likely to find that things have changed a good deal! And one of the most notable recent changes is the extent to which large numbers of citizens are becoming actively involved in the educational process.
For example, in the Los Angeles City Schools, some 12,000 citizens are members of school-community advisory councils. These councils serve as an on-going resource to the local school principal and have given citizens a workable means for bringing about educational change.

Parent education classes, long a vital feature in our Los Angeles school district, continue to increase. In the new Early Childhood Education program, a master plan to restructure primary education throughout the state of California, parent education and parent involvement are mandated by law. Schools which do not provide for involving parents and furnishing parent education will simply not be awarded the additional state funds available for early education.

The School Volunteer Program is another major avenue for citizen participation in Los Angeles. It is the largest of its kind in the nation, with more than 10,000 adult volunteers and student tutors from high schools and colleges contributing some 45,000 man-hours a week to the school district.

Contrast this welcoming of parents and citizens into all aspects of the educational process with an incident which happened not long ago, when a parent wanted to visit her daughter's second grade classroom in a suburban elementary school.

She first presented herself in the school office, identified herself as a parent to the satisfaction of the school clerk, and then received a notice of introduction to give to the teacher.
This notice was clearly printed with instructions that the parent was not to remain in the classroom for longer than twenty minutes. The teacher was engaged in teaching a reading lesson to a group of twelve children, so the mother handed her the notice of introduction and then sat as quietly as possible on a chair the teacher had indicated (at the back of the room). She caught her daughter's eye and was rewarded with a shy half-smile. She thought she'd have liked to venture forth from the assigned chair and see what work her daughter was occupied with at her little table, but she had the feeling that this would cause a disturbance and would be an embarrassment to the child. At the end of the allotted twenty minutes the teacher had to instruct another group of twelve children, so there was no opportunity to talk with her. The mother slipped out of the room as quietly as she had come. She left the school with the feeling that she was an unwanted intruder on the educational scene!

This incident represents the "hands off" policy that schools adopted for nearly a hundred years. Before that, most parents DID educate their children, as best they could. Usually parents trained the children in the farming and household skills, or apprentice skills needed in those times. Their method of teaching was simply to have the youngsters work by their side.

But mass public education changed all that. Reading, writing and figuring became skills considered essential, and as the subject matter thought necessary became more complex, parents no longer COULD educate their own children. The schools became
totally responsible for the child's education, to the point where parents were cautioned NOT to teach children to write their own names or to learn the alphabet, but to wait for the first grade teacher to do it the "right way."

It appears that now, with some parents demanding to be allowed a say-so in the educational process, and with some schools inviting parent participation, parents will be involved more and more, and parents and schools will share joint responsibility for the welfare and education of young children.

No doubt there WILL be some difficult times ahead, as school personnel and parents learn to trust each other and to work directly to help the children and indirectly, ultimately, for the benefit of our entire society.

One kindergarten teacher recently told how difficult it was for her when she first began inviting parents to work in the classroom. She constantly had to fight the feeling that they were judging her competence as a teacher. Now, looking back on that first experience, she feels that while, perhaps, one or two parents looked at her work critically, most of them were themselves nervous and concerned about whether they and their children were "doing well!"

One thing that parents and teachers usually CAN agree on is that there is no easy "formula" or recipe for "instant education" OR for being a parent!

Depending on what qualities one values in his children and in the adults he hopes the children will become, there are many
routes to choose. Some parents subscribe to the idea that children are small versions of adults, still "uncivilized" beings. They have as little to do with small children as possible. We've all heard of the English "nanny," who cares for the child completely, except for a brief tea-time togetherness of parents and children.

Pearl Buck has described the beliefs of many Chinese, who held that, until about the age of seven, children are internally possessed by demon spirits which need to "come out." So the Chinese parents would permit their young children almost any behavior until the age of seven, believing that this was the method for freeing the demons.

In between these extreme viewpoints, endless variations can be found. And it seems safe to say that determining one's viewpoint is a more challenging and demanding task than many mothers and fathers had ever imagined!

In the past, perhaps even when you were growing up, families were more apt to live in the same neighborhood for years, close friendships lasted for years, parents worked at the same job for years, and it was likely that relatives lived nearby. These things did not necessarily insure a better quality of life than does today's fast-changing society. But at least people knew what to expect from day-to-day and month-to-month. And most important, they had many supportive people around them to help and advise, when necessary, in child rearing.

Most of these supportive relatives and friends had pretty much experienced similar problems and a similar kind of life when
they were younger. A boy or girl could grow up expecting to be pretty much like his mother or father or other near-at-hand models.

Now it seems that the only thing a parent can be sure of is that things will change. We KNOW that "tomorrow" will surely be vastly different from "today." We can't always fall back on tried and true ways of coping with life's problems. New conditions--shortages of food and energy, new attitudes (i.e., population control, ecological awareness), new knowledge and information--all demand our consideration and have a direct bearing on the way we raise our children.

Being able to cope with rapid and extensive change emerges as one quality we should probably hope for in all the educated citizens of the future. If we confine our thoughts to the one field of "jobs"--of being able to support oneself, we can see that the importance of being able to cope with change is great. For instance, consider the following:

ITEM: The rapid obsolescence of knowledge and the extension of life span make it clear that the skills learned in youth are unlikely to remain relevant by the time old age arrives.

ITEM: On a recent Sunday afternoon TV discussion show, some authorities agreed that a great percentage of the youth now in school will work, during their lifetimes, at jobs at present not even THOUGHT of!

It is clear that, in the face of many complicating factors, there surely is no one "right" or "wrong" way to care for and educate our children. Concerned parents must be aware, though,
of the alternatives open to them and then make the best decisions they can.

Many parents, as they first take part in their children's schooling, quite naturally worry about their role. They may ask themselves "What can I do in school that will make a difference?" Or "Do I need to know more in order to help the teacher?"

Parents often ask questions such as these: If my son knows his letters, should I teach him to read? Isn't playing a waste of time? If the early years are so important in learning, shouldn't my kid learn to read and write as soon as possible? Aren't some kids just born brighter?

There are many ways to answer these questions. This handbook is an attempt to help serve that purpose. For you to see what YOUR role will be as the school's partner in the education of your child, it is helpful to look at some of the most basic things that psychologists and teachers have learned about children, about the ways that children learn, and the ways their intellectual abilities grow.

The Ways That Children Are Alike

To begin with, children are alike in many ways. The similarities to be considered here are: 1. basic needs 2. progression through stages of development and 3. need to learn.

When we say that children are alike in their basic needs, we mean that a child's bodily needs--freedom from hunger, thirst, illness, extremes of temperature--must be satisfied before real
learning can take place. The psychologist Maslow developed the theory that there is a rank order of "needs" for human beings, and while he did not particularly study children, there is no reason to suppose it does not apply to children as well as adults.

The order in which Maslow ranked the basic needs is:

1. bodily needs;
2. need for safety and security;
3. need for love and
4. the need for self-esteem.

In more familiar words, all children need food, shelter, love from others--and they need to like themselves and to feel that they are worthwhile people.

Anyone who has ever gone on a diet to lose weight can understand how all-encompassing hunger can become! Thoughts of food can dominate the dieter's attention from morning until night. Just so, a hungry child cannot give his full attention to school learning. Fortunately, the National Breakfast and Lunch programs are providing nutritious food for many of our nation's children. But there is evidence that many more children, and not necessarily only those from low-income families, come to school poorly nourished. They may not be "hungry," but the foods they eat lack the protein, vitamins and minerals which children need for physical and mental growth and energy.

It is up to the adults working with young children to constantly assess the child's needs and to be aware of deficiencies which need to be remedied.

-8-
If a child comes to school with any of his basic needs unmet, we can expect that his energies will be directed to satisfying those needs before his attention is directed to productive learning activity. The need for self-esteem MUST be met just as the need for food must be.

All children progress through certain stages of development which tend to be quite similar, and the order in which the stages occur tends to be the same. So that most babies crawl before they walk, babble a lot before they learn to say words, speak one word at a time before they produce sentences. We may have heard stories of children who never crawled much, but one day stood up and walked, but this is the exception.

While most parents have perhaps been aware that children "grow through" physical and social stages (i.e., the young child is at first mainly interested in solo playing, later he plays "parallel," or next to another child, and still later learns to really play "with" a friend, sharing and planning jointly), many parents are now becoming aware that children also grow through definite stages of intellectual development, moral development and even stages of creative development.

In past years, teaching children to THINK was not necessarily agreed upon as a major goal of the school. Most school learning was MEMORIZATION. You were given a book and were expected to "learn" or memorize all that you could from it. Those students with good memories were the teacher's joy! This was the "empty vessel" theory of education--children were considered receptive
vessels which we needed to "fill up" with a prescribed amount of "knowledge."

But more and more there is now an awareness among politicians, sociologists, psychologists and educators that the goal of education--if our planet and its inhabitants are to survive--must be to learn how to change and adapt, in fact to learn how to learn, and how to think.

We don't know exactly what conditions the future will bring--we may be visited, for example, by beings from other solar systems. Or, it's quite likely that our planet's energy resources will become depleted. So that our children need to know HOW to discard old ideas, how to spot new relationships in a quickly changing reality, how to adapt to continual changes, how to make critical judgments.

This kind of knowledge a child does not learn by memorizing lists of facts and historical dates which are quickly forgotten!

If we believe that the main job of education is to teach children to THINK, then we certainly need to know how their thinking processes grow and develop so that we can help this process. In the next section a detailed resume of the theory of Jean Piaget will be presented.

**Intellectual Development**

For more than fifty years, Jean Piaget has been studying the way childrens' minds develop. This development of thinking is often referred to as "cognitive development." Piaget's theory
proposes that growth of intelligence progresses through a series of cognitive stages, each different from and more complex than the one preceding. The order in which the stages appear holds true for all children, but the ages at which they evolve depends upon the child and the quality of the physical and social environment in which he lives. It is the interaction of the child with his environment that results in the development of "mental structures."

The mental structures of children are of a different quality than those of the adult. In order for the mental structures to develop, children MUST be actively engaged with the people and things around them. Mental structures do not develop as a result of passive listening.

According to Piagetian theory, the four main stages in the development of intelligence are as follows:

**Sensory-Motor.** The first stage in the development of intelligence is called the sensory-motor period (from birth to around two years of age). Piaget began by studying the infancy of his own three children, playing with them just as any parent would, but at the same time keeping detailed records of what they did.

He found that the infant learns to coordinate his motor (muscular) activities and his sensory perceptions (what he sees, hears, smells, feels and tastes) into meaningful wholes. Piaget thinks that, to a baby, an object or person looks like a picture, appearing and disappearing. The infant cannot think of an object he doesn't see. If he doesn't see it, it just doesn't exist for
him. Later, as his intelligence develops through interactions with people and things, the child develops the concept of PERMA-
MENT OBJECTS, i.e., that objects have an existence quite apart from his ability to see them.

This may be the explanation for the delight a baby experiences in playing the game of peek-a-boo. The infant is surprised and delighted at an object's re-appearance, because he believes that it does not exist when it is not seen. It is when the infant realizes that objects and persons exist when they are not present to his senses that he can begin to seek after toys which have dis-
appeared from his view.

At the end of the sensory-motor period, the child has memory, imitations, perceptions of cause and effect, identification of people and things. When a child learns to talk, to put words together in sentences, you have a very good indication that he has completed this stage.

The activity in this stage lays the foundations for later abstract, representational thought. Structures are developed which are essential for the mental operations carried on at a later stage of development.

Pre-Operational. The pre-operational stage in the develop-
ment of intelligence (18 months to approximately age 7) is of most interest to parents and teachers of the children in early education programs.
By "operations," Piaget refers to complicated mental processes (thinking) that children up to the age of approximately seven are not yet capable of.

During the early part of this stage, language and the other symbol systems that a child uses are developing at an amazing pace. Now the child can express his ideas in words quite well, and can understand the communications of others. He represents things also in symbolic play (two sticks at right angles represent an airplane, a piece of scrap lumber represents a boat), and in drawing and painting.

However, he thinks that everyone thinks as he does and understands him (if he uses a scrap of lumber as a boat, he thinks that it represents a boat to everyone else, also). His extreme egocentricity results in an inability to put himself in another person's position and take that person's point of view. Piaget has helped us to see that it is intellectual immaturity and not "being contrary" or "mule-headed" which results in childish egocentrism.

The period of time from about age four to about age seven has been extensively studied, and the following characteristics describe the child's thought at these stages:

1. There is a reduction in his egocentricity as he develops a widening social interest in the world around him.

2. The child is perceptually oriented—he judges things in terms of how they LOOK to him. For example, if you pour all of the orange juice from a tall glass into a shallow bowl, doing this right in front of the child, without spilling any, he will
"Pirate and Animals."
by Jordan, age 4
probably still think that there is now a different quantity of orange juice in the bowl (less) than there had been in the tall glass.

3. The child usually can focus his attention on just one variable of an object—the one that stands out visually. In the famous ball of clay demonstration, Piaget made a ball of clay and asked the child to make another one the same size—just as big, with the same amount of clay. Then Piaget took one and rolled it into a sausage shape while the child watched. Was there now more clay, less, or the same amount as in the ball? Children in the pre-operational stage usually said there was more, because the sausage was longer than the ball of clay. They judged simply by the length. They had not yet developed the concept of "conservation of quantity," that the amount could stay the same even if the appearance were changed.

Many mothers have carefully divided a pan of scrambled eggs equally among their children, only to find that the youngest, if his serving is pushed into a mound in the center of the plate rather than spread out over a large area, thinks that he has less than everyone else. Clever mothers have learned that if they spread the serving out, not adding anything to it, he will be convinced that he then has "more."

Just as one of the major tasks of the sensory-motor period was the development of the concept of the permanence of objects—that out of sight did not mean out of existence—in the pre-operational period, the major task is the development of the
concept that certain characteristics of objects exist and endure in the same way. The child gradually learns that such things as quantity and number stay the same, even though changed in appearance.

4. The child has difficulty in realizing that an object or a person can possess more than one property and can belong to several classes at one time. He cannot think of the whole and its parts at the same time.

In one experiment, Piaget would show the child a tray of brown beads, with just a few white ones mixed in. He asked the child which would be longer—a necklace made of all the brown beads, or one made of all the wooden beads? Most children replied that a necklace of the brown beads would be longer, showing that they couldn't reason about the whole (wooden beads) and a part (brown beads) at the same time.

Many of the amusing sayings of childhood may be attributed to this inability of the child to relate the part to the whole—"You're not a man, you're my Daddy!" is one example.

Concrete Operations. The third stage in the development of intelligence is the stage of concrete operations (seven to around eleven years).

Gradually there is change. Through his own actions upon his surroundings, the child enters the stage where there is a major change in the maturity of his thought. He is not yet able to think about problems in a formal, abstract way, but he does reason logically in a concrete way.
"On the Playground" by Dana, age 9
Concrete operations are mental processes which permit the child to do in his head what he would have had previously to accomplish through real actions. For example, Piaget presented five, six and seven year old children with six sticks in a row and asked them to take the same number of sticks from a pile on the table. The youngest children accomplished this by placing their sticks beneath the sample and matching the sticks one to one. The older children merely picked up the six sticks and held them in their hands. Having counted the sticks mentally, they felt no need to actually match them with the sticks in the row. (Since the younger children were all able to count up to six, this was not a factor in their solution.)

The following characteristics of the child's thoughts are descriptive of this stage:

1. His thought is characterized by "decentration." He begins to be able to focus on several dimensions of a problem at the same time and explores their relations. So now he realizes that, in the conservation of liquids, for example, the amount stays the same despite the pouring. He can coordinate both the height and the width of the containers of the liquid.

2. His thought is dynamic, being sensitive to changes. In the conservation of liquid or quantity, he no longer thinks only of the static states which precede or follow the changes, but he pays attention to the transformation itself, the actual pouring of liquid or rolling of clay.
3. His thought is reversible. That is, he can mentally return to the starting point of an action and compare it with the present state. He can mentally pour the liquid back into the first container, or roll the sausage back into a ball.

4. He can deal with the relations among classes of things, being able now to combine and divide class concepts, relating the whole and the parts.

5. He cannot yet cope with abstract thinking.

**Formal Operations.** The final stage of intellectual development (twelve to fifteen years, approximately) is the period of formal operations, which leads to adult reasoning. This stage permits adolescents to think about their thoughts, to think not only about reality, but about the potential. The adolescent can construct ideals and reason about the future. He can construct hypotheses and reason from them.

* * *

According to Piaget's theory, each of the four stages of intellectual development is dependent upon four factors:

1. nervous maturation (the growth of the central nervous system).
2. encounters with experience--the child's interaction with the world around him.
3. social transmission--family care and education.
4. equilibration—a complicated word symbolizing the over-
riding principle of mental development, in which growth progresses
toward more and more complex patterns.

Of these four factors, the only one which is "built in" is
the maturation of the nervous system. The other three factors
all depend on the child's INTERACTION with the world around him.

The child does not develop his intelligence by being "told." He
does not develop his intelligence by being "taught" in words. He
must FIND OUT FOR HIMSELF in order for mental growth to pro-
ceed. The activity of the child is essential. Exploration and
manipulation of concrete materials and objects are needed to
stimulate mental activity.

For example, in order to understand the concepts of "bigger,"
"smaller," "heavier," or "lighter," the child must have directly
experienced all of these things. Merely telling him these words
does not cause him to have an understanding of the concepts.

As the child works with objects and explores and manipulates
them, he discovers things. Some of his discoveries are "wrong,"
but with an adult asking questions or calling attention to prop-
erties he has missed, he can assimilate more information (take
it in) and accommodate to the experience (his mental structures
become slightly changed as a result of interaction with the new
experience). This is learning.

But action, firsthand experience, IS the road to growth of
intelligence. And the experience needs to be with physical
objects, from the earliest days of the child's schooling, up
through the age of eleven or twelve, or whenever the child achieves formal operations. The child's abilities to learn and think in logical patterns come not from the objects, and not from what we tell him about the objects, but from his own actions on the objects. The child's OWN activity is the means for his intellectual growth.

One concept basic to the growth of intellectual abilities is the necessity for sound and motion. In other words, the child cannot be expected to try out things to see what happens, to manipulate things and symbols, pose questions and seek answers, compare his findings with those of other children--unless he can move around and can talk with other children and with adults.

This is going to mean a big change in our classrooms, and one which many teachers and parents will, understandably, find difficult to accept. Only as the adults discover for THEMSELVES that children can and will learn in such an atmosphere, will they be convinced. Adults, too, learn by experiencing!

The experience of the British schools and of many schools in the United States has shown that children learn and enjoy learning while they are moving and talking. If we think about how the child learns things at home--how to construct, how to cook, how to play various games and work puzzles, how to help out with simple household tasks, and if we picture the child while he is learning these and other things, we realize the truth—that learning takes place at home under a multitude of conditions, rarely characterized by silence and stillness.

-22-
If the child can learn so well at home under a variety of conditions--televisions blaring, stereo throbbing, dogs barking, motors revving, appliances churning, neighbors and friends running in and out--then it should not be too surprising that the child can also learn in a schoolroom where there is activity and sound. Perhaps he WILL not always learn what the teacher wants him to learn--especially when the tasks to be learned are not based on his interests--but then he might not learn those tasks under any conditions!

Jean Piaget does not claim to be an educator. Many of the implications for curriculum instruction which are claimed to derive from him are inferences that have been drawn by others. But the following is a direct quotation:

The principal goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done... men who are creative, inventive and discoverers. The second goal of education is to form minds which can be critical, can verify, and not accept everything they are offered. The great danger today is of slogans, collective opinions, ready made trends of thought. We have to be able to resist individually, to criticise, to distinguish between what is proven and what is not. So we need pupils who are active, who learn early to find out by themselves, partly by their own spontaneous activity and partly through materials we set up for them; who learn early to tell what is verifiable and what is simply the first idea to come to them.

Need to Learn

To a normal child, the world is such a fascinating place!
And it seems as if the crawling baby, the toddler and the
pre-schooler are bound and determined to investigate each nook
and cranny of their world. This natural curiosity very often
gets the child into predicaments that are dangerous to his health
and safety. His parents have the problem of keeping him safe,
protecting him from things in the environment which might hurt
him—poisons, electrical wires, sharp objects, objects which
might be swallowed—and of protecting cherished objects in the
environment from the onslaught of the little investigator.

At the same time, his parents must encourage his curiosity
and his desire to find out, to know. For experienced parents
realize that this drive to find out "what makes things tick" is
the basis for later motivation in school learning.

In nursery school education, it has long been the policy to
give children the freedom to make choices. A child can choose to
play alone or with others, to explore the environment or to sit
quietly when he wants to and watch. In nursery education, the
"will to learn" is in action. There is no arbitrary distinction
in the mind of the young child between "work" and "play," and it
seems that his unbounded natural curiosity, as evidenced by his
many questions, will thrust him forward to gain knowledge of
just about the whole world.

It is possible to find many kindergartens where the children
are still learning "naturally," carried forward by their own will
to learn. Sadly, though, in many other schools, even five year old
children are already seen to be imposed upon by the "curriculum,"
and their resistance, even at that early age, has been aroused.

-24-
For example, if everyone is expected to read by a certain age, those who do not learn by that age quickly feel the sting of failure. If the school increasingly imposes a curriculum on the child, he must then conform to this external set of goals or become ever more "behind."

It is at this point that the child very often begins to see himself as a failure, a loser, a poor learner. From then on, the problem of motivation becomes very large. It becomes a matter of manipulating the child to get him to WANT to learn what WE want him to know at the age and stage that WE decide he SHOULD know it. Then we have to rely on all kinds of "external rewards"--such as the threat of grades, or the bestowing of "M and M's," or complicated point systems, etc.

So it is that very often by the time a child is in the second or third grade, he feels that he is inadequate, not living up to the expectations of the school--and he begins to dislike school and all it stands for. Joy in learning vanishes, perhaps forever.

This crippling of the "will to learn" is not only sad, but in our highly technological society it is downright dangerous to the human species. As noted before, the ability to change, to learn throughout life, is essential to the survival of our civilization.

The innate curiosity with which the child comes to school must be nurtured in order that learning throughout the school years can be a joyous and fulfilling experience, and that the
innate curiosity and drive to learn will serve the child as he reaches adulthood in an unknown future.

Differences Among Children

To help you understand your own and others' children, it is important to be aware that children are also different in many ways. Each child is such a unique individual! He is the product of a one-time-only combination of genes. In this age of mass production, he's a marvelous creation, a one-of-a-kind original, different in genes from all others in the world, and never to be duplicated!

In the past, not enough attention has been paid in the schools to children's differences. Since the disappearance of the one-room schoolhouse, children have been grouped according to their age or "ability" as measured on standardized tests. Then they were exposed to subject matter according to the general expectations for their age group. It was hoped that the exposure "took," and then they had "had" whatever the subject might be--American history, civics, etc. Some have called this the immunization theory of education!

One teacher, faced with a class of thirty-five to forty students, could not do much more than teach to the average, hoping that the faster students would not get too bored, and that the slower students would somehow catch up--perhaps with extra homework or special remedial training.
At present there is a growing awareness in the schools that children's differences can be used to aid their learning. By being aware of and recognizing the ways that children differ, you will be able to more effectively help each child. Some of the ways that children basically differ are in pace and timing, interests, temperament, preferred learning styles, and strengths.

**Pace and Timing**

The age at which a child reaches a given stage of development varies greatly from one child to another. We don't know exactly why some children reach stages at much earlier or later ages than others do. But just because a child crawls or walks many months before most others of his age does not mean that he is a genius! On the other hand, just because he takes LONGER in crawling than did his brothers and sisters, or others in the neighborhood, does not mean that he's less intelligent! Remember, it is said that Albert Einstein did not utter one word until he was three years old!

The thing to keep in mind is that there is no obvious relation between "getting there first" and reaching a high level of intellectual development. Piaget gives an example comparing a kitten and a child. It takes a kitten only three months to arrive at a mental state where he has developed the notion that an object is still there even when a screen is placed in front of it. It takes a baby nine to twelve months to develop this idea. Before that, when an object is hidden from him the baby
does not realize that it might still physically exist. Since kittens develop this notion six months sooner than babies, is this an advantage or not?

Piaget answers his own question by stating that the kitten is not going to go much further in his mental development. The child will take longer, but is capable of going much further. So he concludes, of course, that the nine months were not wasted.

When you work in your school, you will observe that some children work slowly, deliberately, and may require twice as long to complete a task as other children. This does not mean that there is anything "wrong" with them. They should be allowed to work at their own pace. It has taken the public schools a long time to recognize this fact and to stop putting a premium on fast completion of projects. It should be remembered that sometimes, as in the fabled race of the hare and the tortoise, "slow and steady wins the race."

Interests

Parents know that all children won't be interested in doing the same things, or in playing the same way. Some little boys love to play with cars and trucks—but not all boys do. Some girls love to play dress-up and to put on makeup "like Mommy"—but not all girls do. A parent sometimes buys a child an expensive toy because it was something he always wanted as a child, only to find his son or daughter could care less!
Many parents can verify that teachers often are so concerned with "telling" and with "teaching the curriculum," that they have little time for LISTENING to the child and for learning what his interests might be. This rich basis for learning can go completely bypassed!

One parent recently told how amazed she was when her nine-year-old daughter brought home a report card with a "C" grade in social studies. The teacher was totally unaware of the child's interest and involvement in a presidential primary campaign. She had accompanied her parents to a political party caucus, where delegates committed to the candidate were nominated and elected, where issues of national interest were debated. Later, the child had worked at the candidate's local headquarters, helping with mailings. She had accompanied her mother in leafleting, and in door-to-door precinct work, listening to voters' questions about, and objections to the candidate. She had carefully listened to and observed the candidate and his opponents in radio and TV interviews.

All of these experiences could have been shared with classmates, and could have been used as the basis upon which to build future learning!

Children's interests and experiences in almost any field—sports, motorcycles, caring for animals, camping, woodworking, music, etc.—are an excellent basis upon which their learning of the academic skills—reading, writing, reporting, arithmetic—can take place.
Temperament

One parent recently told how her first-born child seemed to arrive in the world active, crying intensely, reacting strongly to being changed, held and fed. From the beginning, this daughter had a well-defined, intense temperament. A second child was born more quietly. She recalled that a few moments after birth, when the obstetrician placed this baby on her abdomen, her first impression was of placidity. The baby was smiling in a dreamy way, and with wide eyes seemed to be trying to make contact with this new environment. The mother knew immediately that this baby had a completely different "personality" from the older daughter.

Many other parents also have said that they recognized vast differences in their children's temperaments very early. Now research has substantiated this finding. Children were studied from the earliest months of their lives onward, for ten years, and their characteristic ways of reacting were analyzed very specifically by their parents, by independent observers, and later by their teachers in school. The interesting thing was that their characteristic ways of reacting as an infant tended to carry over throughout childhood.

The babies were "scored" on nine categories of behavior, which, taken all together, were considered to define their temperament. The way that the child's parent reacted to his temperament was extremely important in his personality development. In other words, while the given temperament was very
important, it was not forever fixed or unchangeable. It could be modified by parental handling or special experiences.

The ways that the babies behaved differed from one to another in the following nine categories:

1. activity level--some moved a lot, kicked a lot, were hard to diaper and dress, while others tended to lie where they were placed and moved little.

2. regularity--some were hungry and sleepy, etc., according to an apparently built-in schedule, while others differed from day to day in feeding and sleeping needs.

3. approach or withdrawal as a characteristic response to a new situation--some babies, whenever exposed to a new experience (bath, first taste of juice or a new food, etc.), reacted negatively by crying or spitting out, while others had no trouble with new experiences.

4. adaptability to change in routine--ease or difficulty with which the child's response (as in #3) could be changed in socially desirable ways. Some babies could change their eating and sleeping schedules to fit their parents' convenience, while others fuss so much at any changes that the mother usually had to adjust to the child's pattern.

5. level of sensory threshold--some babies could sleep through any and all noises, while others would startle awake at the slightest rustle. Babies differed in their reaction to lights, the smoothness or roughness of clothing, response to pain, etc. One mother mentioned that when her child was an infant, the only time she could vacuum the house was at ten at night, when the baby was in deep sleep. At any other time of the day or evening, the baby would respond to the noise with violent crying.
6. positive or negative mood--positive reactions were gentle cooing, loud gurgles, smiles, giggles; negative mood was judged to be present by everything from gentle fussing or crying to sobbing.

7. intensity of response--this referred to how much energy the baby expended in his response. One baby may cry softly to let his parents know he's starving, while another may erupt into violent screaming until his hunger is satisfied.

8. distractibility--the non-distractible child would take his bottle until he was full, no matter what was going on around him, while the distractible child could be diverted from his hunger with a rattle or by being talked to.

9. persistence and attention span--even with very young infants, there were great individual differences in the ability to continue an activity in the face of difficulties, such as sucking persistently at a nipple with small holes. Some children kept at it, while others quickly gave up.

If we can be aware of the temperamental differences among children, we can key into these differences, thus helping them cope more effectively at home and in school. For example, a mother who is aware that her child's characteristic response to a new situation is one of withdrawal, will expect to introduce a new food in tiny amounts over a period of time while the child slowly and gradually becomes accustomed to it.

And the aware teacher will take extra pains to provide quiet times and places for the child whose sensory threshold does not allow him to learn best when there is lots of noise and motion going on around him.
In these and many other creative ways, parents and teachers can help children by making allowances for their differences in temperament.

**Learning Styles**

Children also exhibit differences in the ways that they approach a learning task, and in their preferred learning characteristics. Parents and teachers must be keen observers of their children in order to answer the question, "By what methods does this particular child best learn?"

One teacher told of Robbie, age seven, who could not seem to learn to print his name. His teacher had tried everything she could think of to help him, including a number of visual-tactile experiences, like making sandpaper letters and helping Robbie trace over them with his fingertips, yarn letters using the same method, chalk, crayon and painting the letters—all to no avail.

She knew that Robbie was extremely active physically, so she took him out to the play yard one day and she drew the letters of his name around six feet long in the dirt. Then she asked him to spread out his arms like wings, and "fly" over each of the letters like an airplane. As he "flew" over each letter, Robbie repeated the name of that letter. Using his whole body in this way got results—he was at last able to print his name on paper when he returned to the classroom.

Some children learn more effectively through the visual mode, by SEEING. Learning to read by sight-reading whole words may be
best for them. Others learn better through the auditory mode, by hearing and remembering sounds, so that learning to read by phonetic methods is best for them. Some learn physically, by forming the letters and words with their lips and hands. And many children need a combination of methods.

Children also show differences in their needs for the following:

1. Variety of materials to appeal to the different senses--some children need many more concrete, three-dimensional experiences than others do.

2. Repetition of experiences in order for learning to take place--some children need many, many repetitions--others seem to "catch on" after only one or two.

3. Support, reinforcement and encouragement from other children and adults--some children need a lot of approval and many encouraging words and gestures, while others prefer to work quite independently.

4. As they get older, children have differing needs for working individually, or in pairs, small groups or committees. Some prefer working with one or two others, some need to work alone.

5. Structure and routine--some children need to know what they will be working on each day at the same time--others find variety more to their liking.

6. Learning by wholes or by pieces--one child will memorize tables, dates and details of methods with no problem,
while another usually can't memorize details well until he knows the significance of the whole area of learning he's mastering.

7. Total immersion--some children seem to learn best when they don't stick at one task too long, but can change from one to another. Others, however--and perhaps too little attention has been paid to their needs so far--like to plunge into a task and stay at it until they've mastered it.

The late famed author, actor and playwright, Noel Coward, was once asked how he could do so many things so well. He replied that he takes on one task at a time, with the exclusion of all others, and attacks it to the best of his ability. Traditionally, perhaps we have tried to do too many things at one time, with minimal concern for childrens' varying needs in this respect.

In English primary schools, the "free day" concept, which allows a child to complete a task before moving on to another, appears to enable children to develop greater powers of concentration and sustained effort.

Strengths

At home, where a mother usually views her child as an individual, she is aware of what kinds of things the child is good at, what his "strengths" are. In enlisting children's help in doing household chores, it is much more efficient to allow children to work at the chores they prefer and are able to do a
successful job at, than to force them to pursue work they dislike and don't do well. To complete a job successfully increases the child's self-esteem and may give him the confidence to try the tasks he needs more help with.

Just so, in school we can first encourage children to express themselves in ways they are good at--talking rather than writing--painting rather than talking--dancing rather than painting, for examples. Eventually they will gain confidence and learn to use modes of expression they once felt uncomfortable with or were not yet ready to handle.

Conclusion

The thing to keep in mind is that a child's differences must be acknowledged and respected if he is to develop self-esteem. We need to find his area of interests and strengths and build on them. We need to accentuate the positive, to repeat the words of an old song.

Very often, in thinking of our children, we focus on the negative aspects of their behavior or deficiencies in their learning--i.e., "he CAN'T sit still," "his handwriting is terrible," "her spelling is atrocious." This is understandable, since naturally we want to help them improve. But if we could, at home as well as in school, become aware of WHAT the children like, HOW they prefer to function, and what they ARE good at, we would go a long way toward helping them to realize their potential.

-39-
For example, eight year old Charles could barely sound out his words. He thought of himself as a "failure" at reading, and had pretty much given up, in spite of his sympathetic third grade teacher's efforts to help him.

One Monday morning Charles came to school with a dead sting-ray he'd somehow captured at the beach. It wasn't quite in the class plans for that day, but the teacher was sensitive to Charles' need to be important in his friends' eyes, and that morning he certainly was! The other children asked many questions about the dead fish, none of which Charles could answer. His friend Walt suggested Charles could go to the school library to "look up" the answers, and he offered to help him. So the two boys went off to the school library, carrying the dead fish with them, of course. In an hour of work, they found enough information to satisfy their curiosity for the time-being.

Charles and Walt reported their findings to the class, and Charles decided he would ask his parents to help him locate more books about fish in the public library. He had a REASON for reading. It was important to him, based on his INTERESTS. And in the process, he would improve his skills in reading, writing and reporting, and he would also have an experience which renewed his feelings of his own personal worth.

With one teacher for thirty or more children, it is almost impossible for a teacher to be aware of the differences among children with respect to interests, temperament, pace of learning, preferred learning styles and strengths. But with more adults in
the classroom, it is possible for the teacher and the parents to observe the children closely as they work and play in order to become aware of their differences.

And finally, with more adults in the classroom, additional activities and experiences can be provided so that children can learn while working at projects which are of genuine interest to them.

Questions and Answers

Some questions that parents ask about the ways that children grow, develop and learn seem to occur with great frequency. The answers to the following questions are based on developmental philosophy of education—that is, a philosophy of education which views development as a—or the—major aim of education.

QUESTION: WHAT DOES SELF-CONCEPT MEAN?

ANSWER: Self-concept is the way the child thinks and feels about himself. It is like a picture of himself that he has in his head. To a large extent, the child's success in school and later in life depends upon his self-concept.

If the child's basic needs are met, and if he has been loved and given positive encouragement, he will in all probability develop a healthy self-concept. He will like himself. Many educators now feel that unless a child has a healthy self-concept, very little positive learning can take place in school.
A child's self-concept is very much a result of how the important people in his life feel about him. If adults are often telling him that he's bad, he tends to feel he IS bad, and to act that way, too.

In their eagerness to improve a child's mind, adults need to be careful that they don't damage a child's self-concept by putting too much pressure on him, or by expecting behavior that is beyond the child's stage of development. The child can easily come to view himself as "no good" or "stupid" if he has repeated experiences of failure.

QUESTION: HOW CAN PARENTS AND TEACHERS HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPTS?

ANSWER: One investigator found that children who think highly of themselves had been raised with total or nearly total ACCEPTANCE by their parents. Parents set clearly defined limits, which they enforced, on their children's behavior. The children knew what they were allowed to do and what was not allowed. As compared with children who thought poorly of themselves, these children were found to be personally effective, and were capable of creative and independent actions.

Another way to say it is: SUCCESS leads to more SUCCESS! In school, the child needs to be successful to improve his self-concept. A child who tries and CAN DO feels good about his own
abilities. Therefore, the adults working with him need to find out what the child is good at--and build on that!

QUESTION: ISN'T PLAYING A WASTE OF TIME?

ANSWER: NO! Play is as necessary to a child's healthy growth as are food and sleep. But for many years play was considered to be the unrespectable opposite of work. So many parents found school to be boring places; now when they see that children seem to be "playing" in some schools, they find it hard to believe that the children are not wasting time.

Among the many purposes which play serves are these:

1. Play serves as a safety valve for letting off physical and emotional steam, helping children to stay on an even keel.
2. It lets children relive many of the experiences they've had. As they play, they raise questions which can lead to increasingly better understandings--if an attentive adult is nearby and can provide additional experiences. For instance, some young children who had experienced a violent earthquake which had all but destroyed their homes, were "playing" earthquake. As their teacher watched their play, she realized that they had no understanding of the cause of the earthquake. One child appeared to think that a giant monster hidden in the closet began to shake the house, thus causing everything to shake and fall. This led the teacher to plan instruction for the children which would in a very simple way, without
increasing their fears, explain what is known about the cause of earthquakes.

3. It lets children plan in advance for things that may happen to them. This "planning" function of play can often be used to help children through some new experience, such as the expected birth of a new baby, or the event of the family's moving.

4. Children come into contact with problems—social, emotional and intellectual. Problems arise constantly in play situations—for example—how can the eight children who wish to play in the block house which has room only for four be accommodated? By cooperatively working out a solution to such problems, children see themselves as competent individuals, able to solve problems that may confront them. Significant learning occurs more readily in relation to situations perceived as problems.

5. Children improve their skills—physical-motor, social relationships, language and intellectual skills. One mother told how her five year old son had been playing with blocks for an hour. He apparently was working out some concepts of number, for as he put the blocks back in their box, he told his mother with excitement, "If you had twelve blocks, you'd have two sets of five and two left over!"

QUESTION: HOW DOES LANGUAGE RELATE TO THE YOUNG CHILD'S THINKING?
ANSWER: It used to be assumed that thinking was almost entirely dependent on language, or words. But Piaget's influence has been such that a new view has emerged.

Thought, according to Piaget, is based on actions, and the stored representations of action. Thought is present before language. We see evidence of thought in the baby and young child's play, in his gestures and imitations, and in his representations (scribbling, drawing, painting and sculpturing). If we learn to look carefully at all of these symbolic expressions of the young child, we can understand a great deal about his thinking.

As the child grows older, entering the stage of formal operations, Piaget feels that language becomes increasingly more important to the child's thought development.

Recognition that the child's actions are crucially important to the development of his thinking has led many schools to encourage children to work in learning centers with concrete objects—where they can touch, taste, smell, try, pour, mix, etc.—instead of MERELY dealing with WORDS.

Of course, developing language facility in the young child is extremely important. The thing to remember is that children often use language without the faintest idea of what it means.

For example one parent told how she was quite impressed the first time her kindergarten child recited the "Pledge of Allegiance" to the flag. The second time he said it, she realized he was saying "One nation in the vegetables, with liver, tea and juices for all."
We need constantly to check out the language children use, to be sure they understand and have experienced the meaning of the words!

QUESTION: IF MY CHILD CAN COUNT TO TWENTY AND BEYOND BY THE TIME HE STARTS SCHOOL, DOES IT MEAN HE'S UNUSUALLY BRIGHT?

ANSWER: It may mean he has an excellent memory! He has committed to memory the names and order of our numerals, just as he might memorize the words to a song. He has learned the words "by heart," but he may have little or no idea of what they mean.

Again, the child may give the appearance of "knowing" something, when he's merely repeating words.

If your four year old could bring you twenty pebbles that he had counted out from a pile of pebbles, you'd know he had the start of the CONCEPT of "twenty."

QUESTION: WHAT ABOUT TEACHING MY CHILD TO READ BEFORE HE STARTS SCHOOL?

ANSWER: Obviously, we hope all children will learn to read. The questions to be concerned with are: WHEN should this child read? HOW should he be taught? That is, not only will he know how to read, but, if he is properly taught, his attitude toward reading will be a lifelong joy. Unfortunately, with the majority of our adult population, this is not the case!
In a Gallup poll, the population surveyed was divided into those who were high school graduates, those who had attended college but not graduated, and those who had graduated from college.

Dr. Gallup found that fifty percent of the high school graduate group had not read a book during the previous year; forty-six percent of those who had attended college but had not graduated had not read a book during the previous year; and approximately one-third of the college graduates had not read a book all the way through during the previous year.

Dr. Gallup concluded that adult Americans do not particularly like to read or buy books, especially when he found that in another research sampling, nearly two-thirds of the adults reported that they had not read a single book all the way through during the previous year.

Some children can and do learn to read and write earlier than around six or seven years of age. But (unless the child learns to read pretty much on his own) the effort necessary to teach the four or five year old to read will be much greater than the effort which would be required if he is taught at a later age. And, unless the child has shown great interest and desire, he may develop a negative attitude toward reading in the process.

Children who are taught to read early (as opposed to those who read early on their own) are no different than their peers in their ability to read by the time they are nine or ten.

Even if the child could learn to read with little effort at the age of four or five, and emerge with a positive attitude
about reading, there are important questions to consider about the appropriateness of a sitting-down, physically passive task such as reading for the four or five year old.

If the theories of Piaget are correct, and if intelligence grows through actions, then probably it would be better for most four and five year old children to be running, skipping, tricycling, building with blocks, singing, playing musical instruments, experimenting with dirt and water, learning eye-hand coordination by throwing a ball, and generally interacting with real objects and people.

One five year old boy virtually taught himself to read while in Kindergarten. He had shown great interest in learning the names and sounds of the letters of the alphabet, and succeeded in a short time in reading phonetically. His mother tells of being surprised that the child, once having learned to "decode" or to figure out what the words said, showed little interest in reading books by himself, and in fact, preferred to have his mother read to him. He was an extremely active child, and wanted to deal with the world in an active, first-hand way, rather than by reading about it! In later years he became an avid reader.

A parent or teacher can usually tell if a child is interested in learning to read. He will show this by asking about words, painting letters, trying to write letters, requesting that stories be read to him. A teacher can seize the opportunity to teach the child the "decoding" skills when he shows this strong interest. She can help him BECOME interested by reading stories to him.
"A Man"
by Jordan, age 6
encouraging him to "make-up" stories and writing or typing them for him, but letting him see her use written words whenever possible.

A parent can encourage a child's interest in reading by letting the child see the PARENT reading. And the parent can occasionally point out to the child that he actually is reading--sometimes children think that parents aren't reading when they are reading to themselves, since the child can't HEAR them. He doesn't understand about silent reading.

Perhaps the most effective stimulus to an interest in reading is to make a practice of reading TO the child. Books should be carefully chosen to be interesting! Every child should be read to every day from a book the reader really enjoys! Surrounded by the printed word, normal children will want to learn to read, and they WILL learn.

QUESTION: WHAT CAN I EXPECT MY CHILD TO LEARN IN SCHOOL DURING THE FIRST EARLY YEARS? (UP TO AROUND GRADE THREE)

ANSWER: You can expect him to develop or maintain a positive self-concept, where he sees himself as a worthy person, capable and competent. By the time he is eight or nine, you can expect him to read, write and have the beginnings of math skills. You can expect him to love to learn--that is, the school should support his own natural curiosity. And, if the school seems to be damaging him in any way--physically, socially, emotionally, cognitively--you have the obligation to make your concerns known! He's YOUR child!
QUESTION: WHAT CAN I DO TO ENSURE THAT MY CHILD IS SUCCESSFUL IN SCHOOL?

ANSWER: The following attitudes and behaviors on the part of a child's mother have been found to correlate with success in school (this could just as well apply to a father or older brothers or sisters)--most studies focus on the mother's behavior since the mother usually spends the most time with the child.

1. The mother thinks of herself as an important educator of her child, recognizing that her attitudes and skills are necessary to his intellectual growth.

2. She meets all the child's basic needs, including the need for emotional security.

3. When the child is an infant, she responds quickly to his fretting, usually attending to his distress as soon as he cries.

4. She spends a lot of time entertaining her baby--talking, smiling, playing with him face-to-face.

5. After the age of one year, when the child begins to walk and talk, she does not keep him caged up, but encourages his curiosity and freedom within limits of safety.

6. She pays attention to the child and acts in response to his overtures. (She does not constantly order him around.)

7. She provides him with objects, whether toys or homemade playthings and kitchen utensils.

8. She provides lots of conversation in the home--she listens to the child, answers his questions, asks questions which cause the child to think.

9. She "enriches" situations and words by means of giving reasons, causes, naming inner states of behavior, expanding upon the child's speech. (Example: Child says "I want the ball!" Mother answers, "You want this fuzzy ball?")
10. She provides consistent discipline with explanatory control. (Gives reasons for her actions.)
11. She allows and encourages the child to play make-believe.
12. She allows him to make things, so he gains a sense of his own mastery.
13. She reads to the child and provides him with educational toys and books if possible.
14. She plays table and word games with him.
15. She works her "teaching" as much as possible into her daily routine, carrying on conversations with the child as she works.
16. She herself reads and owns books and magazines.
17. She values intellectual effort and expects the child to learn well.
18. She encourages independent thinking and freedom of discussion.

QUESTION: WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHILD DOESN'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL?

ANSWER: If the child is reluctant to go to school or has difficulty in adjusting to school, the school MAY be causing the problem. You should contact the teacher or the principal and discuss the problem.

If, after a good adjustment at the beginning, the child is reluctant to attend, many parents tend to blame the problem on the child. But, it is sensible to ask the school what is going on. The child should continue attending while you and the school personnel work to solve the problem. From this example, the child can learn that when problems occur, they need to be dealt with.
Also, he can learn that, while dealing with problems, a person often has to do something even if he doesn't want to.

QUESTION: WHAT IS PROGRAMMED LEARNING?

ANSWER: A learning objective is defined specifically. To reach it, the child must ascend sequential steps of learning tasks, mastering each step task before attempting the next. Programmed materials are often in the form of work-books, or cards which are inserted into various kinds of learning machines, which automatically give instant "feedback"—letting the child know if he has answered incorrectly and needs to repeat the task, or if he may proceed to the next step. This sort of learning may be appropriate for some tasks and for some children.

But, it should be remembered that the tasks are generally to be completed by children quietly working at their desks. The decision as to what kinds of materials to become involved with is made by the company publishing the programmed materials, not by the child. And usually these materials are printed—words and possibly pictures—rather than real things.

Programmed materials do not provide opportunity for the child to question, share ideas with other children, react to situations or test ideas on others, all of which are necessary for the development of his intellectual capacity.

Programmed learning generally is not suited to the young child's needs for highly interesting materials and for active involvement. Certainly, the lack of choice and lack of creative
planning which is inherent in programmed materials should cause teachers to think carefully of alternative ways they can help children learn.

QUESTION: WHAT ABOUT ENCOURAGING MY CHILD TO BE CREATIVE?

ANSWER: One researcher has defined creativity as the ability to see, to be aware, to respond. Another says that it is the ability to combine familiar things in new ways. And still another says that creativity is an inevitable outcome of developmental process when the required degree of mental health is present.

A common characteristic of the creative child is a persistent tendency to ask questions about things that puzzle him. So, high on the list of ways to encourage creativity is

1. Respect the questions that your child asks, even if they seem weird or unusual to you. Albert Einstein was considered a "bad" influence on his classmates, since he "embarrassed" his teacher by asking questions such as "Why can't we feel the earth move?" "What is space?" "What keeps the world from flying into pieces as it spins around?"

2. Similarly, respect the imaginative ideas your child presents for consideration, by showing him that his ideas have value.

3. Allow the child to be an individual, to be himself, by respecting his differences.

4. Provide stimulating experiences for your child by taking him on trips, outings and excursions.

5. Avoid negative evaluations of the child's efforts. Encourage rather than belittle. Praise rather than criticize. Remember, if the child ends up about HALF right, that he's "on his way to being right!"
QUESTION: WHAT WORK CAN I DO AS A CLASSROOM VOLUNTEER?

ANSWER: There are many, many interesting activities that mothers, fathers and grandparents can take part in.

You may work as a child's tutor in math or reading on a one-to-one basis.

Or, you may work directly with the teacher in the classroom, helping to provide an additional experience for a small group of children. You might read the children a story, take "dictation" while each child tells you an original story, supervise construction activities, aid children in cooking or baking, etc.

If you have a special talent or skill, such as making tortillas, playing an instrument, knowing how to embroider or crochet, or to work macrame stitches, you may wish to share these skills with the children. Whatever your strengths and interests are, let the teacher know! Because when you share with children the things that you really enjoy, it will be the best possible thing!

The children will be delighted. The teacher will be freed to work with children who need it individually or in small groups. And you will be rewarded by the look of pleasure on the children's faces as they're learning. You will find it's fun to help others learn.

* * *

-57-
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Brady, E. "The Autonomous Learner--Not the Programed Learner." A position paper for California Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.


