

Reading

We all want our children to write and read. For those interested in our approach learning to write and read is not only a matter of acquiring basic skills, however important and worthwhile these are in themselves. Learning to write and read (in that order) forms an integral part of the child's development.

Many parents of children taught by our approach initially believe that their children learn to read later than children taught by other methods. It is true that children taught in this way learn the mechanics of reading slightly later. It should be emphasized however that the approach introduces the preparatory stage of learning to read around the age of five to six and does it in a way that directly relates to the child's inner experience.

When children enter grade 1 (age 6) their interaction with the outside world is mainly through their limbs and senses; it is not through their intellect. Our teachers appreciate that it is far easier to take this interaction as their starting point. In many cases the opposite happens and children are forced into "decoding" when their experience is not ready for it. This can easily result in an unhappy experience and the forming of learning barriers.

It should be appreciated that the adjustment from the real world to the world of symbolic form needs to occur gently and gradually. The starting point should be children's inner experience. It would be wrong therefore to frustrate or damage the six year olds imaginative faculties in any way; thus no demands are made to abstract or theorize. Yet this is exactly what will happen if children are forced or coerced into the theoretical task of decoding at the age of six or earlier.

From our viewpoint it is essential that the intellectual development involved in children learning to read gradually emerges out of their inner experience. In essence that it emerges out of the pictorial representation and image making that all six year olds possess. The task of the teacher is, therefore, to provide the structure so that the adjustment from the world of image making to the world of symbolic form occurs easily.

The preparatory stage for this should not be rushed and commences between five and six. Thus if we are to accurately describe our approach we need to say children learn the initial and preparatory stages of reading between the age of five and six and this occurs earlier than other methods which almost solely concentrate and equate learning to read with the skill of decoding.

The vast majority of children will make the adjustment to decoding with little difficulty at rising seven (some even later). Certainly no child before this age should be regarded as in need of remedial assistance.

Once children have made the initial adjustment to the world of symbols they should be placed in an individualized reading scheme: in doing this the teacher will be able to provide books which relate to each child's ability, temperament (extremely important), interests and needs. If all this happens in the right way children will grow up with a love of reading and books. This, in the final outcome, is much more important than technical achievement at an early age.

Proof - In Finland children do not start school until they are seven and understandably they are poor readers at that age. A considerable number of children learn to read music before they learn to read words. At fifteen Finnish students are the best readers in the world and they also excel at mathematics and science.