

School Days
by Nancy Mann

Starting kindergarten must require certain skills, so curious about those skills, I conducted a quick search on the Internet...

“Readiness skills” listed were:

Enthusiasm for learning

Language skills

Ability to listen

Independence

Playing well with others

Fine motor skills

Draws people with at least two body parts, Basic number or letter recognition ... and Understanding gender!!

There are things you can do to help a child, but there are also hopeless cases!

To help with enthusiasm for learning, point out different things in the child's surroundings--wall clock versus digital alarm clock, cooked meals versus fast foods, socks versus tights, etc. The more a child notices, the more curious that child becomes. Look at fashion magazines (your child may look at Vogue at the wasted-away fashion models on their photo-shoots, and point out which one is skinny and skinnier, and also, upon looking at the mod clothing, exclaim, together, “What is THAT?”)

For language skills, try going to the Zoo. Give new words to what is being seen, i.e. “Do you see the tiger? The tiger has stripes. The stripes are dark...See? This sign says Striped Tiger”

Bypass the pachyderm enclosure with the new, huge corporate sign “TOYOTA”!!!

For listening turn off the T.V., using the word “Off”. Today's child might be amazed to see his or her parent full-face, rather than a Whistler's Mother's profile! Ask the child if he or she wants popcorn, liverwurst. or licorice while TV-viewing....the child expected to hear “Popcorn or pizza?” and will listen more carefully next time. Do not confuse words, and sounds, such as “sensuous” with “since you”, as one man said when he used the remote to turn off the T.V...he would joke “I wanted to marry a sensuous woman.” He could be heard saying “Ha-ha” “Sensuous already up, why dontcha bring me some beer!”

Independence? The research gave an example “Can open up a juice pack and insert a straw.” Why not list “Able to put on and take off jacket” which would help the teacher with 20 youngsters at recess! By the way, the sentence “Open up a juice pack and insert straw” appears in a U.S. army manual for basic training! Send your child to kindergarten if in doubt as to this skill. If our government can wait eighteen years to see this development, what is four or five years?

Playing well with others is un-American! Eight-year old boys are being drafted for baseball teams, in spite of the ensuing shoulder and arm injuries! Competition, including kindergartners

mastering karate, is the American Way! Do any modern children know how to play? I know they spend up to 50% of the day on their I-Pods, or texting....medical schools need to turn out doctors capable of treating thumb-texting or carpal tunnel injuries in the future!

Kids take so many lessons, what happened to the days when a parent could yell "Go out in the yard and sit on a tree stump!" Did that idea and remark really hurt anyone?

Fine motor skill development means threading spools on a wire, or picking up Cheerios. Any normal child can help with pouring out the Cheerios.

Basic letter recognition means going to K-Mart, where you can say "See K-Mart? Let's spell it together..."K...M...A...R...T..." This promotes an equal footing in school, bringing sensibility to the child whose parents shop at Neimann Marcus!

Drawing pictures? Did you know Leonardo da Vinci was expelled from school entirely! (This was partially because he was illegitimate, I confess) Andy Warhole's parents might have been poor, but they still had a couple of Campbell soup cans in their home for him to draw!

I remember Becky Campbell. Going home to her house after kindergarten is still vivid in my mind! Becky's parents were an older, white-haired and kindly couple. They gave me a cinnamon-sugared donut and showed me Becky's drawings--in her bedroom and in her playroom, and indeed all over the house! Becky had scribbled on every wall! This girl couldn't wait to enter school with drawing as non-existent on her readiness skill list, but it would have saved her parents and prospective house buyers from many sleepless nights, and scrubbing the walls, while Becky sat in the den, nonchalantly spilling Cheerios on the tables for her fine motor skill training.

Why isn't "Recognizing food" listed? I remember one boy in kindergarten class...Herkie. Herkie Gisselbeck, of Minneapolis, the famed pencil eraser and toy soldier chewer, or eater, who once consumed a large rubber and foam ball on the playground! Herkie's mother was ever embarrassed, and tired. She was tired from running Herkie to the Emergency Room to get his stomach pumped at odd hours! With a name like Gisselbeck, (German? Swedish?) Herkie had wide access to plentiful and tasty food right at home; so go figure! On the second day, Herkie ate my Graham cracker. This was a matter of food recognition training; I'm still not ready to list Herkie as a hopeless case.

Suddenly I am nostalgic for the old days of common sense...remember the scene in the 1935 Depression Days movie with Bud Cort where he shares a boiled egg with an overall-clad and barefoot kindergarten girl in that one-room schoolhouse? That little girl fed the chickens in the morning and probably rode a mule to school!

Why isn't "Follows directions" on the list? I remember one girl in kindergarten class...Susan. Susan Stedman. On the first day, when the kindergarten teacher kindly asked her to join the other kids at a table, Susan folded her arms across her chest, tightly, clenched her teeth, and tapped her foot. When the teacher repeated the direction, Susan shouted out at her "Lady, none tells ME what to do!!!!" Was this a good way for Susan to begin the 12 plus years of required education? Or was this a hopeless case?

"Understanding gender" makes me wonder who made up the list of readiness skills..

There is now more testing, standardized testing, diagnosing, and more evaluations than ever in our educational history. Counselors and psychologists are gathered in the halls, waiting outside

the kindergarten door! To this day, I'm not sure I understand gender?! I know I was never tested.. Maybe I'm just jealous. But I could catch up with the group, I'm sure. I could look at, and start collecting pictures, enthusiastically, pictures that the other kids drew of people with 2 to 4 body parts, and study them and keep a notebook of them, or something. Sit in for a slide show. I know I'M not a hopeless case, and my crayons and sketch pad are ready. There will be after school classes, remedial class, or summer school, for sure! I'll stand in line for that!!!!