

The Early Education Reform Group is firmly of the opinion that because school is compulsory for children, it should also be compulsory for schools to provide a system which is comfortable and happy for each and every child.

*We aim to improve the quality of education by working towards the following:*

- \* Teachers in the early years (P-3) to be especially trained in early childhood growth and development, and
- \* Classes small enough to allow for individualised teaching in order to accommodate the wide variation in developmental levels of children aged 4-8 years.
- \* An ungraded system so that children may move at their own pace, and not be regimented into grades as in our present system.

## Diary of a child's thoughts

*"Nature has enclosed man's higher aptitudes as in a shell; if you break the shell before it opens on its own, you will find only a budding pearl. You will have destroyed the treasure you should have preserved for your child."*

*Pestalozzi, famous 18th - 19th Century educationalist*

OCT.18,1990: Now I'm five. It was a beaut party, and I'm a big boy now, Mummy says. Soon I'll be going to school, and boy, that'll be fun. Jeremy can't go - he's too little, but I'm big now.

DEC.12,1990: This is my last day at kindy. I don't really like leaving Miss J. because she's nice, but I'm big now and I have to go to school.

JAN.29,1991: Hooray, at last it's time to go to school. I have my new hat and uniform, and my new bag. Today I'll learn to read and write and do sums just like my big brother Mark.



JAN.30,1991: I have to go to school again today, I didn't learn to read yesterday, but Mrs T, read us a good story and we had fun drawing it. Maybe I'll learn to read today. I wish the seats weren't so hard.

JAN.31,1991: Mrs T, said I'm an awful wriggler, but I really can't help it. My legs just won't keep still. Yesterday was a very long day - I was sure \* \* \* glad to see mummy.

FEB.8,1991: Gee, you sure take a long time to learn to read. Mummy says I have to learn to sit still, and Mrs T. says I musn't keep talking to Bill but he's my friend and, besides, I hate sitting still and doing all that stuff all the time. I wonder what the kids are doing at kindy?

Parents have been conditioned to think that five is the correct age for children to go to school, when in fact it is quite in order for them not to start until the year after they turn six. In turn, parental expectations are passed on to children who regard five as the magic age when they will start school, and learn to read and write. Almost invariably children enter school full of joy and enthusiasm, bursting to learn, and little dreaming that for many of them the situation will prove difficult, stressful, and at times fearful.

The child of five to six years is in a stage of rapid physical growth, and sitting still is extremely difficult, often producing tension and irritability if required for more than a few minutes. In order to allow that growth to proceed smoothly and fit in with all other aspects of development, it is highly desirable that children be allowed to have maximum freedom of physical movement. Sitting still is \* \* \* far more tiring for young children than running about jumping and climbing.

APR.19,1991: I wish I didn't have to write with those pencils, they slip all the time and Mrs T says I must try harder but my hand gets tired and hurts and the writing gets crooked. I bet Miss J is missing me.



Children's physical development takes place in a certain sequence, and at five many children are still at the stage where it is more comfortable for them to write or draw using a "whole arm" movement rather than to use their small finger muscles. Requiring children to do the latter too soon often results in awkward pencil holds, which causes quick tiring, and emotional upsets.

\*\*\*

MAY 7,1991: I wish I could hop like Tommy Green - my feet get all mixed up and then the kids laugh. They won't let me play ball either because I drop it all the time. I can ride my bike real good

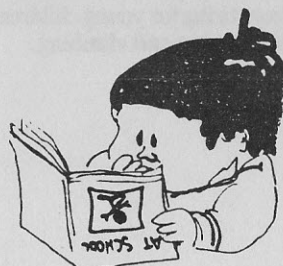


Many five year olds are not yet able to hop comfortably, or skip or catch a ball. This is quite normal, and given time, opportunity and encouragement these skills will all be learnt when the time is right.

Boys are developmentally six months behind girls as a general rule, so we may expect them to be slower in some of these areas. Forcing can damage - remedial classes are predominantly filled with boys.

\*\*\*

MAY 28,1991: I really hate that reading book. Sometimes I can remember the words, but then they get all jumbled up and my eyes get tired and I get too tired for anything.



To a child whose visual skills are not yet ready for concentrating on print, a page of words can turn into a meaningless confused "jumble". This causes anxiety and frustration, and he may begin to fear "reading" instead of finding it the joy it should be. This may affect her whole schooling life and maybe her later life.

JUNE 18, 1991: I couldn't remember what Mrs T.,said today and I did the wrong thing and Tommy Green laughed. I hate Tommy Green because he gets everything right all the time. Mummy says not to worry but I wish I was smart like Tommy Green.



Children develop at their own individual rates. In a class of first grade children there is always an enormous variation of stages at which the children are capable of functioning. This makes individual teaching a "must" if each child is to be given maximum opportunity for success. Many young children have not yet developed listening skills, and being given more than one direction can produce confusion and distress.

\*\*\*

AUG.6,1991: I wish my stomach didn't feel sick when it's time to read and write and I wish I didn't have to try hard all the time it makes my head hurt. Billy reckons school is dumb and we should have stayed at Kindy. I punched Tommy Green today when he called me dumb-bell and I got into trouble. School sure is awful.

Being unable to cope emotionally and socially with the stresses of school is one of the major factors causing difficulties for children. When school fails to measure up to their rosy dreams, confidence evaporates, disillusionment sets in and the zest for learning is lost.



by Lil Gwyther (E.E.R.G.)

This is an Early Education Reform Group publication.  
For further information: PO Box 477, Ashgrove 4060.

Adapted from article first printed in Qld Kindergarten 1981.