

KINDERGARTEN PLACEMENT

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Not Quite Right: Issues of Over-placement and Red-shirting

A child's readiness for a particular school program is indicated by his or her physical, social, emotional, *and* academic readiness, leading to his or her ability to cope and sustain in that environment *without undue stress or awkwardness*.

Some children may show signs of strain when placed in a school situation before they are fully ready to meet the demands of that classroom and if there are not the proper supports and resources in place to meet the child where he or she is developmentally. A child in this situation may exhibit the following behaviors[iii]:

Overt (Easy to see)

- *Physical* – The child exhibits fatigue, frequent colds, and inconsistent visual and hearing perceptions.
- *Social* – Has few friends, may lash out in anger against peers, relates better with younger children. Those not showing anger may withdraw.
- *Intellectual* – Has difficulty finishing work, erratic achievement (good one week, poor for two weeks). Low or average work despite high I.Q.
- *Emotional* – May be moody and easily upset, does not enjoy or want to go to school.

Covert (More difficult to spot)

- *Avoidance* – May avoid dealing with problems, daydreams.
- *Conformity* – Wants to please others, does only what is asked, tries to make the teacher happy, exhibits very little creative thinking.
- *Passive Resistance* – Does not argue, may even be pleasant and agree with everything, but is resistant when it comes to doing anything.
- *Overdrive* – High social and academic skills; may not be very creative, is interested in obtaining good grades. This child appears to “have everything” but may be at great risk for eventual burnout.

While research has shown that delaying Kindergarten alone does not have a long-term effect on *academic success* for the average child,[iv] there may be immediate short-term benefits including less stress, increased motivation to learn, and a stronger self-concept. These then turn into long-

term benefits as the child grows. One of the most important goals of Kindergarten is to foster a love of learning in the child. When children are over placed, they often feel like they are failures.

On the other hand, waiting a year so that a child will be the biggest football player in the class or because waiting a year is the trendy thing to do to “get ahead” is not wise either. The decision whether or not to enter Kindergarten should be made with the child’s best interest in mind. This is why it is imperative to understand the demands and expectations of the Kindergarten program where a child will be enrolled. In this way, an informed decision can be made in regard to what is best for the child. Parents should talk to the teachers and administrators at prospective schools before making enrollment decisions.

Just Right: The Developmentally Appropriate Classroom

The “just right” Kindergarten classroom is one that meets the developmental needs of each child. In these developmentally appropriate classrooms, teachers trust in children’s natural abilities and recognize their individual developmental needs. They plan environments that balance active, child-initiated learning with teacher-directed instruction. They allow for physical movement, freedom of expression, active communication and interaction, and individual and group problem solving.

Activities are open-ended so that the outcome for each child will be at his or her individual level of development. For example, in a daily journal, one child may be using complete sentences while another still primarily scribbles pretend letters and uses pictures to convey thoughts. One is not “right” or “wrong”, they are both examples of what is “right for that child.”

Such classroom structure fosters the child’s innate drive for purpose, competence, autonomy, and responsibility. Initiative is nurtured when children are encouraged to take appropriate risks. The resulting choice and decision-making produce interest and motivation, and lead to learning which is meaningful, relevant, and lifelong.

Optimal learning is dependent on children’s manipulation and experimentation with materials, and questioning and communication with adults and peers. The developmental Kindergarten classroom is activity centered, drawing directly from the child’s interests and abilities. Integrated theme learning allows children to live and think in the classroom as they do naturally outside of the classroom. The curriculum fully incorporates music, art, movement, and drama. Learning through instructional themes encourages spontaneous and instructive play in the classroom and draws on the developmental progression in content areas such as reading, math, writing, science, and social studies. Perhaps most importantly, the developmentally appropriate classroom meets the needs of each individual child, providing activities and experiences that meet the child where he or she is on the developmental spectrum.[v]

Parents shouldn't make decisions for children based on personal greed, vicariously living their child's life, or on adult peer pressure. Desiring the brightest child in the class, longing for the best athlete in the class, or pushing a child solely to "keep up with the Jones" does no child any good. When considering what's best for a child, parents should remember three guiding principles to help ensure their child's success:

1. **Know the child, not just what the child knows:** Recognize and understand natural developmental behaviors in a variety of situations.
2. **Know the program:** Beyond the specific academic demands, know what behaviors will be expected of the children in the program as well as what the program offers in terms of play time, social-emotional development, parent involvement, and more.
3. **Know that every child is in a constant process of growth and development:** Respect and cherish each stage of a child's development, and be informed about developmentally appropriate expectations for the individual child.

Conclusion: Goldilocks Goes to Kindergarten

"Goldilocks tried the first Kindergarten and it was too HARD. She tried the second classroom and it was too EASY. Then she tried the third classroom and it was JUST RIGHT."

[iii] Ilg, F.L. (1972). *Overplacement: The problem that doesn't have to be*. *Teacher*, 90(1), 16-25.

[iv] Marshall, H.H. (2003). "Opportunity deferred or opportunity taken? An updated look at delaying kindergarten entry". *Beyond the Journal: Young Children on the Web*. September 2003.

[v] Bredekamp, V.S. & Copple, C. (1997). "Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs". Washington, DC: NAEYC.