

"Childhood Should Be A Journey...Not A Race"*

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September 1, 2002... Millions of children will enter grade one. Of that group, thousands will fail to pass. Others will repeat a grade in the next two or three years. Scores more will continue to struggle each year as they proceed on lock-step year by year. "Education experts estimate up to twenty-five percent fail school or struggle and never reach their potential. That means one-fourth of all the children are off their grade level." (Jim Grant, author 'I Hate School')

Were they all ready for the rigors of a school program when they entered grade one?

What is readiness anyway?


Is there something parents and teachers can do to assure each child is as ready as possible?

We hear of many areas in which parents can help their child be prepared for school by teaching their child to:


- Have a loving relationship with God and his/her family
- Practice good health habits
- Develop a positive self-image
- Have the ability to socialize appropriately with others
- Have a curiosity for learning about the world around him/her
- Learn basics like the alphabet, counting, etc.

As a first grade teacher I agree with all of these. But there is one thing that stands out above all others.




As a  pried out of its shell would be weakened,



As a  forced open would cause the flower to be harmed or destroyed,



As a  pressed out of its cocoon is unlikely to wing its flight,



So who are each born with a timepiece unique to them also do best when given the opportunity to develop at their own rate without pressure.

A child...

Is born
when it's
Ready

Teethes
when it's
Ready

Creeps
when it's
Ready

Talks
when it's
Ready

Walks
when it's
Ready

Goes to school when...

*(Used with permission Staff Development for Educators**)*

Children entering grade one tend to fall into three categories. The first group seems to be at just the right point of readiness. They have reached a balanced level of maturity physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. The second group seems to be fine in some of the areas but weak in others. Is it best to wait until the weak areas have more time for development? The third group shows a weakness in all or most areas. Is this a red flag suggesting that "a gift of time" be given for sure?

On what basis does one make a decision as to whether or not it's in the child's best interest to start this year or wait until next year?

Is it possible for a school to provide a transition year between kindergarten and grade one for children who need "a gift of time"? Presently, Pre-First programs are popping up in many areas of the U.S. in response to this pressing need.

What happens to the child who started too soon? Is there a way to give him "a gift of time" to get on track?

How does one make well-informed decisions about retention that deals specifically with what's best for the individual child?

What are the consequences of social promotion?

As I have sought for answers to the above queries, it is with much gratitude that I have become acquainted with a wealth of informative materials available from the "Staff Development for Educators" website on the Internet. Their mission is to "enhance the quality of children's education by providing highly effective and timely professional development, resources, support, and encouragement for all

educators." Check out the [SDE website](#) and discover for yourself the many in-services, workshops and materials available just waiting to answer your questions. It is an excellent resource with links to other educational websites.

Through their [bookstore website](#) books, videos, and other materials can be purchased. Watch for authors like Jim Grant, SDE founder and executive director, who speaks and writes on topics of school readiness, multi-age classrooms, and how to make commonsense decisions in the area of retention and promotion. Titles to watch for include:

"I Hate School", which is being revised and republished as "Low Grade or Wrong Grade" in September, 2002 (K-8)

"Retention and Its Prevention", which focuses on retention, school readiness, and an extra year of time. (K-8)

"Retention/ Promotion Checklist", which looks at child development across all domains. (K-8)

"Developmental Education in an Era of High Standards", which is made in a reproducible question/answer format. (K-8)

Another good book on the topic of readiness is "Summer Children ...Ready or Not For School". by James K. Uphoff, June E. Gilmore, and Rosemarie Huber. In addition, James K. Uphoff has written the book "Real Facts From Real Schools" dealing with the topic of readiness and extra-year programs. Thirty-eight studies are used for illustrative purposes.

My heart goes out to the many children who are pressed into formal education before they are really physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally prepared for it. My prayer is that we consider suitable solutions and alternatives to allow children the best opportunity for success.

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Resources:

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