The Five Dimensions of Readiness

From the National Education Goals Panel*

This overview of the Five Dimensions of School Readiness presents the key domains under each dimension and a summary of the rationale behind each of the dimensions. For more information about the dimensions and the research that informs them, please see the full article referenced in the footnote. More information about the National Education Goals Panel is on its website, http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/datasystemlinks.html.

I. Physical Well-Being and Motor Development

A strong body of research links maternal and child health to performance in school. We know that conditions such as very low birth weight and poor nutrition may have long-term effects on a child's preparedness for school. Basic information about the child's health history is vital for understanding the condition in which children come to school. In addition, early childhood educators emphasize the importance of optimal motor development in children, from large motor movements that occur on the playground to small motor work required for holding a crayon or putting together puzzles.

A. Physical Development

- Rate of Growth—Height, weight, and physical maturation
- Physical Fitness—Stamina, energy, strength, and flexibility
- Body Physiology—Optimal functioning of the body and its organ systems.

B. Physical Abilities

- Gross Motor Skills—Walking, running, jumping, climbing
- Fine Motor Skills—Cutting with scissors, fastening buttons
- Sensorimotor Skills—Vision, hearing, touching, kinesthesia (e.g., kicking a ball rolling in the child’s direction)
- Oral Motor Skills—Sucking, coordination of breathing, movements necessary to produce speech.

II. Social and Emotional Development

This dimension serves as the foundation for relationships that give meaning to school experience. It involves a sense of personal well-being that comes from stable interactions in children’s early lives and interactions that enable children to participate in classroom activities that are positive for themselves, their classmates, and their teachers. Critically important conditions of social and emotional development include emotional support and secure relationships that engender the child’s acquisition of such characteristics as self-confidence and the ability to function as a member of a group.

A. Emotional Development

- Self Concept- consisting of traits, habits, abilities, motives, social roles, goals, and values that define how we perceive ourselves:
  - Primary emotions—Joy, fear, anger, grief
  - Sensory stimulated emotions—Disgust, delight, horror
  - Self-appraisal emotions—Shame, pride, guilt.
- Includes the ability to comprehend the feelings of others:
  - Empathy, understanding, acceptance.

B. Social Development

- Ability to form and sustain social relationships with adults and friends is central to children’s preparedness for school
- Social Competence with Adults includes:
  - Ability to communicate with adults
  - Ability to understand and identify adult roles.
- Social Competence with Peers has two aspects:
  - Social skills necessary to cooperate with peers:
    - Understanding rights of others
    - Distinguishing between incidental and intentional actions
    - Treating others as one would like to be treated.
  - Ability to form and sustain reciprocal friendships:
    - Listening to others’ points of view
    - Willingness to solicit and act upon others’ points of view
    - Providing help and support for friends.
III. Approaches Toward Learning

Approaches toward learning refer to the inclinations, dispositions, or styles rather than skills that reflect the myriad ways that children become involved in learning and develop their inclinations to pursue it. Approaches to learning that vary within and between cultures must be respected, making undesirable a uniform or "cookie cutter" approach to early childhood education with the goal of all children coming out the same. A child can be successful in school in many ways, and families and teachers should understand the various ways that children become engaged in learning in order to know how to enhance and not discourage their engagement. Curiosity, creativity, independence, cooperativeness, and persistence are some of the approaches that enhance early learning and development.

A. Predispositions

- Gender—Influences attitudes toward subjects (e.g., mathematics), about one’s own abilities, how one approaches a task, and attributions for success and failure

  Note: Differences in the cognitive development of young males and females are empirically insignificant, but parental and teacher expectations frequently vary by gender, which can affect children’s attitudes and motivations.

- Temperament—Variations can influence the way children think, perceive, understand, judge, and solve problems

- Cultural Patterns and Values—May affect children’s work styles, including their comfort working independently or socially

B. Learning Styles

- Openness to and Curiosity about New Tasks and Challenges—Approaching learning with inquisitiveness or passivity characterizes a child’s style of learning

- Initiative, Task Persistence, and Attentiveness— Enables children to develop and follow through on plans and tasks

- Reflection and Interpretation—Includes the capacity to seek models, absorb information, and work through alternate possibilities

- Imagination and Invention—Associated with the ability to form images of what is not actually present and to extend conventional thinking

- Cognitive Styles— Refers to why children approach learning—e.g., Do they separate details from background and analyze information (field-independent style) or vice versa (field-dependent style).
IV. Language Development

Language empowers children to participate in both the cognitive and affective components of the educational program. Experience with language, in both written and oral form, provides children with the tools to interact with others and to represent their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Communicating effectively with other children and adults and having emergent literacy experiences with diverse forms of language are fundamental elements of this dimension.

A. Verbal Language

- Listening
- Speaking
- Social Uses of Language—Language as a tool to get services and objects, express emotions, get and give information; language as part of social convention and manners
- Vocabulary and Meaning—Meaningful words and sentences understood, explored, and used; relationship terms; complex sentences linking simple sentences in terms of sequence or causality
- Questioning
- Creative Use of Language—Rhyming sounds and words; storytelling.

B. Emerging Literacy

- Literature Awareness—Interest in various forms of literature; recalling familiar stories
- Print Awareness—Aware of print permanency; aware of connection between text and oral storytelling; assigning verbal labels to letters, and sounds to letter combinations; recognizing own name in writing
- Story Sense—Aware of story sequence
- Writing Process—Produce ordered scribbling.
A foundation for later learning is provided when children have opportunities to interact with individuals and materials and, as a result, are encouraged to learn from their surroundings. Children's transitions to formal schooling are eased when children have been provided with a variety of play-oriented, exploratory activities, and when their early school experiences continue these activities.

Cognition and general knowledge represent the accumulation and reorganization of experiences that result from participating in a rich learning setting with skilled and appropriate adult intervention. From these experiences children construct knowledge of patterns and relations, cause and effect, and methods of solving problems in everyday life.

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<th>A. Physical Knowledge</th>
<th>D. Cognitive Competencies that Young Children Develop Through Interaction with Different Types of Knowledge</th>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of objects in external reality learned by observation and experience with the objects—e.g., a red, heavy ball rolling downhill.</td>
<td>• Representational Thought—Ability to think about things not present</td>
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<td>• Problem-solving—Ability to experiment using different strategies; cause and effect; interpret and generalize</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Mathematical Knowledge—Ability to put objects, events, actions into relationships; explore sequence; cardinality and ordinality</td>
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<td>• Social Knowledge—Ability to be aware of self-family, community, physical environment, and natural world</td>
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<td>• Imagination—Ability to “formulate rich and varied mental images, see beyond the obvious, or draw upon experience in inventive and effective ways” [Jalongo, 1990, p. 195].</td>
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<th>B. Logic-Mathematical Knowledge</th>
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<td>Knowledge constructed within the mind of the individual that establishes similarities, differences, and associations between objects, events, or people—e.g., a red and blue bead may be different if the variable under consideration in the mind of the individual is color, or the same if it is based on size.</td>
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<th>C. Social-Conventional Knowledge</th>
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<td>Knowledge that reflects agreed-upon conventions of society and that could not be reinvented by every generation of learners—e.g., the English language has 26 letters, including 5 vowels and 21 consonants.</td>
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About “Executive Function”:

As the MA Depts. of Early Education and Care and Elementary and Secondary Education develop unified the MA Early Learning Standards, we will incorporate into the Standards the key findings coming out of the new brain research. This additional perspective will be collected under the category of “Executive Function,” which spans several of the “Five Dimensions of School Readiness.” Sub-domains and Indicators for Executive Function will be developed over the next year.