***2.6 Better Late Than Early***

For some reason, educational authorities all around the Western world have locked into ages 5-6 as the time when all children should begin school. However, boys generally are between one and two years behind girls in the development of their emotional, mental and physical maturity (Moon,1993). Such a system that enlists children that are underdeveloped and hence unable to cope with formal schooling, may result in a cycle of failure for some. Dr. Raymond Moore and world renowned remedial teacher, Dorothy Moore claim that, from their research, *"there are eight boys for each girl in classes for the emotionally impaired, and thirteen boys for each girl are in remedial learning groups"* (Moore, Dr. R. & D., 1986, ‘Journal of School Health’).

A number of studies by top learning and development authorities warn of the dangers involved in forcing children into formal schooling at an early age (Lincolne, 2017; Bronfenbrenner, 1970; Elkind, 1931, p.28-31; Dr. Moon, 1993, p.45; Dr. Moore, 1994, p.42, 245; Rohwer, 1971, p.316-341).

Rushing children into formal study before their senses, thought processes and physical capabilities are mature and ready for it, (usually age 8 to 10), can cause problems such as myopia of the eyes, frustration and anger from hearing incorrectly, insecurity and fear of failure, hyperactivity, as well as feelings of inferiority and other emotional disorders. Many children diagnosed as slow learners and others with ‘Attention Deficit Disorder’ and ‘Hyperactivity’ (ADD & ADHD) and supposed ‘Dyslexia’, have not been ready for formal schooling at an early age. Research has shown that many of these children have simply developed a fear-blockage to learning due to constant failure. Such children would excel later-on if they were not forced by parents, labelled by teachers, and ridiculed by peers. Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein were both slow learners, who were taken out of school by their wise parents and given a lot of creative freedom and encouragement.

In the final analysis, there is a significant body of research (Moore, 1979, pp 175-186; Elkind, 1970, pp 25 & 180-188; and Rohwer, 1971, p. 41 & 316-341 and others) which points to the conclusion that, where possible, children should be withheld from formal schooling until at least age eight. During Finland’s most successful years of the international PISA testing, they only commenced formal schooling at age 7.

W.D. Rohwer Jr., in the ‘Harvard Educational Review’, 1971, suggested that:

*" All of the learning necessary for success in high school can be accomplished in only two or three years of formal skill study. Delaying mandatory instruction in the basic skills until the junior high school years could mean academic success for millions of school children who are doomed to failure under the traditional school system"*(Rohwer, 1971 cited in Moore, 1986, 'Journal Of School Health').

These are radically different views from the normal paradigms; but worth thinking about more deeply. So keep reading for our balanced view. One of our own children was a later developer (in reading skills) and couldn’t read until age 10, but then 6 years later received a four-year university scholarship into Engineering.

In the light of the above, we can at the very least say there is no need to rush your children into a ‘heavily structured formal academic programme’, particularly if you sense that your child is not ready for such learning. The above researchers, as well as the Smithsonian Institute, recommend that children in this lower primary age group should have much free exploration time in a warm, loving environment, with heaps of focussed attention by responsive parents and adults, rather than peer socialisation and structured schooling.

The flip side of this argument is that we have found that even delayed learners will benefit from a daily routine of academic skill development exercises; however, we recommend short lessons of 15 to 20 minutes only.

The educational emphasis in the preschool to lower primary years should be more on ‘Learning Through Living’, ie using everyday activities in life, and every interaction with others as valuable learning experiences. Many parents agree with this natural learning, ‘apprenticeship’ or ‘discipleship’ method of learning, but also desire to use some educational resources to help prepare their young children for academic learning. This is fine, providing the young child is not forced through a heavily structured programme for long hours virtually ‘chained’ to a desk. Learning should be fun, in order to develop the child's love of learning.

For preschoolers, we therefore recommend preparing your children by reading to them, lots of interesting discussion, character-based habit training, household chores and routines, nature-walks, plus ‘hands-on’ activities and games. Of course, one of the great benefits of home-based education, is that your children can progress quickly or slowly, depending on their readiness. You do not have to fit in with someone else's agenda or time-frame.