

School readiness; a critical review of perspectives and evidence ^[1]

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Excerpts

In this paper we argue that these concerns stem from a mismatch between increasingly evidence-based pedagogical understandings within the early years sector and the curriculum required to be delivered within Primary schools in England, arising from and compounded by the continued intervention of recent governments.

Government policy perspectives

Causes of the growing frustration amongst early years educationalists have been encapsulated succinctly very recently within the contradictions printed within some of the policy framework documents released by the government in 2011. Within documents such as Supporting Families in the Foundation Years (DfE, 2011) and cited sister reports, the phrase 'school readiness' or 'readiness for school' is used with a variety of connotations. This reflects a wider trend within policy advisory groups over recent years, in which the phrase has appeared with increasing frequency but to different ends. In parallel, the phrase is being used by academics and educational advisory groups to reflect their conceptions of young children's 'readiness' within not just schools, but other provision of care and education. The arguments surfacing about whether, how and why a child should be 'made ready' are symptomatic of the far deeper tension growing within the early years education sector, in relation to a deep conceptual divide. There is no agreement upon a definition of the term 'school readiness' or 'readiness for school' and its use because there is no agreement upon what young children should be prepared for; in essence, the disagreement about terminology and definition encapsulates a fundamental difference in conception of the purpose of early years education.

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Conclusion

The model of 'readiness for school' is attractive to governments as it seemingly delivers children into primary school ready to conform to classroom procedures and even able to perform basic reading and writing skills. However, from a pedagogical perspective this approach fuels an increasingly dominant notion of education as 'transmission and reproduction', and of early childhood as preparation for school rather than for 'life.' In this paper, we have reviewed the now extensive evidence that the curriculumcentred approach evident in many Key Stage 1 classrooms, and the idea that rushing young children into formal learning of literacy, mathematics etc as young as possible is misguided. This leads to a situation where children's basic emotional and cognitive needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, and the opportunity to develop their metacognitive and self-regulation skills, are not being met. The problem is not that children are not ready for school, but that our schools are not ready for children.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: curricula and pedagogy ^[4]

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