

## Too Much Too Fast

Written by Dr. Niru Prasad

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### Too Much Too Fast, Meeting the Challenge of Early Learning - By Dr. Niru Prasad

Parents today are over-enthusiastic about giving their kids the best of everything in life, be it education, toys, clothes, and other accessories. Good parenting is the key to success in raising a well-accomplished healthy youngster. However it is important to remember that children need quality time spent with their parents, as well as, unconditional love. Parents teach and influence children more through their actions than with their words and as they grow older, they follow in the footsteps of their parents. An apple does not fall too far from the tree.

The facts and fundamentals of growing. During the 21st century, there has been too much emphasis on early learning and extracurricular activities for our kids which is okay, but sometimes it might be too much pressure on young children as they are growing up. There was a time when children played from morning until night, they ran, jumped, and created endless stories out of their active imaginations. Today, by the time children are three or four years old, they are already getting pressured academically to learn and participate in other organized activities.

As a matter of fact, thanks to Sesame Street (which began in 1969), the revolutionary idea that learning could be fun for children as young as nine months old became popular. Sesame Street spawned an entire industry of DVDs, toys, and computers aimed and teaching toddlers. Our parents are happy and tempted that kids with help from Sesame Street and the Learning Channel are getting smarter and ready for daycare and pre-school.

Toddlers have more curiosity and like to explore, hence the educational toys as well as outdoor activities and playgrounds are more appreciated by them. There are lots of benefits of play among our toddlers, pre-schoolers, as well as kindergarten kids. Child initiated play lays a foundation for academic success. Through play, children learn to interact with others, develop language and motor skills.

During the pre-school years, i.e. three to five years, kids are being exposed to learning. The early learning program can help children develop the knowledge and literacy skills important for school. However the early head start program that started in 1999 works to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, enhance the healthy development of very young children and promote a healthy family functioning. As a result preschool is not what it used to

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be.

There are carefully planned strategies to teach these kids numbers and alphabets. It is a documented fact that young children are capable learners and should be provided with a rich language environment and quality cognitive stimulation.

Early childhood educators are feeling pressure to get their youngsters ready for kindergarten of the 21st century, which is more advanced and academic in nature, so that eventually these kids will be better prepared for standardized tests in reading and math. Now kindergarten has become more like first grade so that pre-kindergarten classes have to support a high quality program. The pre-kindergarten program establishes a positive foundation for three to five year old children towards developing languages, cognitive functions and social interaction. This should be a fun place for our kids.

Pre-school graduates going to kindergarten meet a lot of challenges with their learning and extracurricular activities such as swimming, baseball, soccer, ballet dancing, etc. It is important to note that from the ages of five to seven years old, social and emotional developments are as important as learning. Going to school should be fun for these kids who should be allowed to advance at their own pace.

By now they have developed a sense of how to work with letters, count, add, subtract, etc., and they are building vocabularies. We as parents can help them by reading story time, helping with school assignments, and by giving them quality time, affection, and getting involved with their school activities.

The new first grader. Now since their reading lessons start in kindergarten, the first graders are meeting lots of challenges with their studies. Kids as young as six are being frequently tested for English and math proficiency due to the standardization testing. Instead of story time, finger painting, tracing letters, the first graders are spending their time coding math and reading. After school there is homework, educational videos, more tutoring to motivate them more.

The graduating first grader. Thirty years ago the first grader was learning how to read. Now since the learning process has started since kindergarten, the first graders are facing more and more challenges of advanced learning at school and at home. Among affluent families, the

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pressure to succeed at a younger age is an inevitable by-product of an increasingly competitive world. Lately some experts have begun to question whether our current emphases on educating these kids might have gone too far too soon.

Scientists have proved that children are wired to learn from birth and an enriched environment, one with plenty of books, stories, rhyming and conversations, can help kids from all different socio-economic backgrounds. The federal law of the "no child left behind" act established by President Bush in 2002 requires every principal of all schools throughout the county to make sure third graders are able to read.

There have been frequent national standardization tests offered at elementary schools to enforce this law. This has thrown a lot of pressure and challenge for the first and second graders however with the help of the Baby Einstein line of videos and CDs an entire industry has sprung up to help overly anxious parents.

According to the Academy of Pediatrics, for five to seven year old kids, social and emotional development is as important as learning and going to school should be fun for them. Testing kids before the third grade only gives a snapshot of what they know, however, it is a poor predictor of how they will perform later.

In summary, since our emphasis on early learning for our kids has gone too far too soon, we need to slow down since the process of learning for kids should be a whole child approach with flexibility.