

The Consequences

Depression among children is at an all-time high, as are behavior challenges.

Why? Because nature intended that young children learn through play, and they're being denied that right. Also, children are anxious to please the important adults in their lives. When they're unable to do so – because they're not developmentally equipped to do so – they become anxious and frustrated. The result is that they often either retreat inside themselves or act out as a way to express their unhappiness.

What We Know About Child Development

- It's simply not possible for all children to do and know the exact same things at the exact same age.
- All children go through the exact same stages in the exact same order but they do it at varying rates.
- Each domain – cognitive, physical, emotional, social – has its own rate of development.

And here's the big one:

- A child's development *cannot* be accelerated or hurried! No matter how much we might like to, we cannot alter nature's plan.

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Earlier Isn't Better



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Whether we're discussing academics or athletics, the idea that earlier is better has become deeply ingrained in our society. But the truth is that it's unhealthy for a child to be prodded to complete tasks before he or she is developmentally ready.

There is a large range of what is "normal" in child development. For example, the average age children learn to walk is 12 months – 50% *before* and 50% *after*. But the *range* that is normal for walking is 8-3/4 months to 17 months. The same applies for reading. The *average* age children learn to read is 6-1/2 – again, 50% before and 50% after. Still, parents and schools feel the pressure to teach children to read as soon as possible.

Less often reported is that children taught to read at an early age have more vision problems, and those taught at age 5 have more difficulty reading than those taught at age 7. Also, usually by 3rd grade there's no

real difference between those who started reading early and those who started later.

And, of course, children required to read before they're developmentally ready commonly learn to hate reading.

The Academic Pushdown

Unfortunately, reading isn't the only skill children are being asked to acquire early; requirements in all school subjects have risen as curriculum is "pushed down" from higher to lower grades. Kindergarten, according to a study from the University of Virginia, has become "the new first grade." And preschool has clearly become the new kindergarten. All of this is happening despite an abundance of research demonstrating that hurrying children is more detrimental to them than beneficial.



"When you start something before the brain is prepared, you've got trouble."

~ Early childhood expert Jane Healy

Children Haven't Changed

Although the goals of policy makers may have changed – and keep changing – children have not.

It may appear that children are smarter and savvier these days than they used to be, but according to the Gesell Institute of Child Development, children are not reaching their developmental milestones any sooner than they did in 1925, when Arnold Gesell first did his research.

Despite this, teachers, more and more, are being asked to teach in ways that are developmentally inappropriate. They're asked to make demands of students whom they know are not developmentally ready to meet such demands.

As a result, both the teachers and these young students are burning out.

None of this does anything to endear children to learning – something that they're born loving.