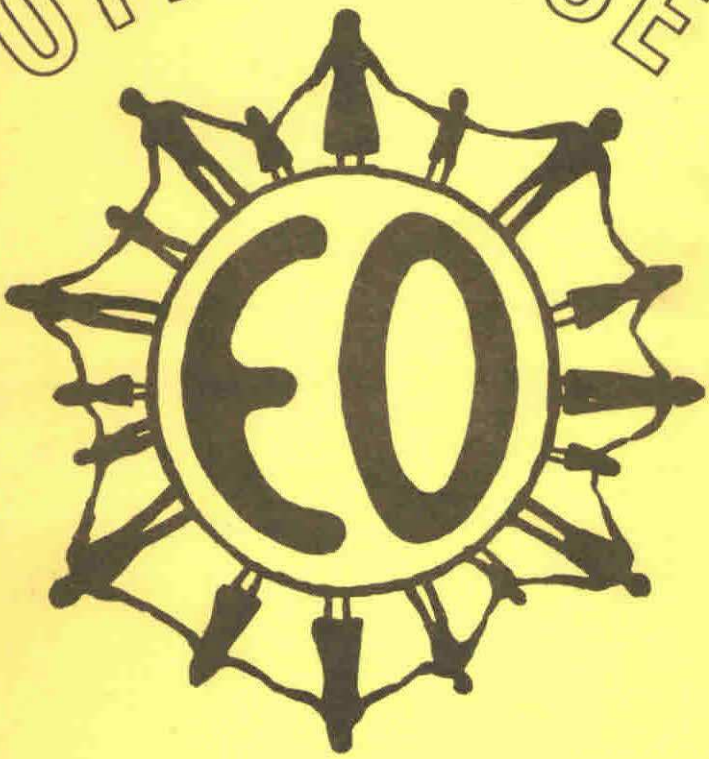
EDUCATION OTHERWISE



EARLY YEARS

suggestions for a learning programme for the under 12s

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An information leaflet
published by
Education Otherwise,
The Manor House,
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Norfolk.

INTRODUCTION

This guide has grown out of our original booklet written and published two years ago, shortly after EO started. Since then many parents have asked for further information and ideas, and others have contributed ideas on ways and means of learning that they and their children have found to be good. In this way this second edition has developed not as a final cut-and-dried document, but as a series of approaches that is continually growing. There are bound to be gaps - ideas and practical suggestions that have been left out, but the guide is a flexible one: it will be continually revised and updated to incorporate additional material as it comes in. So please do continue to send in your contributions so that it can continue to grow and improve.

The information given here follows on from our booklet "First Steps" which is a guide to the legal position, how to approach your local education authority, and how to present your programme to meet their requirements. This booklet is available (price 40p plus 10"x7" sae) from the address opposite.

For those with children under five

You are already educating your children, because you are looking after their needs and development. Education Otherwise is about simply continuing that process after they become five years old. The child's needs do not suddenly change at the "magic" age of five; they evolve gradually through the infant years. There is no reason why you cannot continue to take the basic responsibility for the child's education if you so wish, once they become officially "school age". There is no one way to "educate" your child, of course, any more than rearing them. Here are some suggestions from other parents.

If we are thinking of teaching our children at home we should perhaps ask ourselves a few basic questions before launching into the construction of a programme.

For instance, what do we understand by the term "education"? What are we teaching our children for? Do we want to model our activities on the school or do we want to use the opportunity to evolve something new?

Some people will be very confident that they know what the child should be learning at each stage. But given that certain skills <u>can</u> be taught at early stages, it should be considered whether such an emphasis is beneficial for the child's all-round development as a well-grounded person. Alice Yardley ('Mother' magazine, January 1979) gives the example of gardeners using chemicals to speed the ripening of tomatoes and finding that inside they were hollow.

If we feel it most important to teach skills and pass on factual information, are we neglecting to nourish children's imaginations - for example by introducing them to fairy tales and folk stories, giving them opportunities for singing and moving to music, for acting (in the impromptu way that children love to re-create certain situations)?

It is easy to put too much emphasis (perhaps due to pressure from educational advisers) on the child producing something, to spend all the time "doing" and allow no chance for "being". We should be aware of the possibility that in encouraging children always to label, count or explore things at an early age we might be pre-empting their natural feeling for the mystery and wonder of the world.

It is perhaps as well to remind ourselves often that we do not after all know a great deal about how a child develops and how learning takes place. If we encourage a child to develop quickly in one area are we really doing him a service? We should examine our motives for what we are doing.

We should perhaps be aware of what activities we encourage and approve of and which ones we feel are less worthwhile. If a child prefers playing with dolls or dressing up to reading or writing one day, do we feel guilty or make the child feel it is less worthwhile? Is it possible for us to know what the child needs all the time?

Another variation is the temptation to see every situation as a "learning experience". Should cooking be enjoyed for its own sake or used as a means of conveying mathematical concepts? Children have an uncanny knack of knowing when we feel that certain activities are "good for them".

The sort of programme you plan for your children will be determined by how you see their needs. Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori were two people who saw the needs of children differently from their contemporaries (and from each other). We include these accounts not because we think that parents should follow one or the other in detail, but to illustrate that a variety of approaches exists.

STEINER

In recent years interest has been shown in the ideas of Rudolf Steiner with relation to child development and education. It is difficult to give an account of his philosophy of education without going into great detail about the anthroposophical principles on which it is based. However it might be relevant to introduce some of the themes that occur in his writing.

Rudolf Steiner describes the child's development as a series of roughly seven year periods:

During the period from birth to about 7 years, the child's energies should be taken up with physical growth, and development of the will. At this stage it is very important for the child to be in an environment of beauty, love and warmth, where people's action are not immoral or foolish. Learning occurs only through imitation and example, so instruction and admonitions are of little use.

During this time the child is learning about the world through all his senses and should be encouraged to paint (with the primary colours only) and to develop a musical sense. Singing and dancing are important to physical growth and to the creation of a sense of rhythm in all things.

The child should not be over-stimulated or introduced to an intellectual way of looking at things. Television, cinema, radio and records are not seen as having a healthy effect in that they encourage a lop-sided development and do not help children to use all their senses or to come to a real understanding of their fellow human beings.

Toys should be beautiful and simple. If they are too abstract ot over-elaborate they do not nourish the imagination. For example, rather than a set of geometric nesting cubes, it is preferable for the child to have a set of those brightly painted Russian dolls. The dolls

they play with should not be the 'pretty' variety but wooden or rag dolls with only sketchy features - allowing the child to endow them with characteristics from his own imagination.

In the Steiner view, the child should not be being 'taught' anything at this stage, including reading and writing, rather the parent should be allowing the forces within the child to develop in as natural and full a way as possible, not putting obstacles in the way, and allowing a firm foundation to be laid for the next period.

Having given the child the actual physical pattern for him to copy before the age of seven, Rudolf Steiner says that between the loss of milk teeth and puberty, new forces of growth are released, and we must bring into his environment things with the right inner-meaning and value. The child should hear about the outstanding figures of history, stories of the lives of great men and women. The child would be taught about the laws of nature in the form of parables rather than in terms of abstract principles.

"Intellectual concepts are only one of the means we have to understand the things of this world and it is only to the materialistic thinker that they appear as the sole means.... In this time of life (between the change of teeth and puberty) we must not dry up the child's mind and spirit by cramming it with intellectual concepts."

According to Steiner, it is not until puberty that the human being is ripe for the formation of his own judgements. Before this time the child should be spared from all theories about things.

Fairy tales play an imprtant part in the Steiner system of education as many of them contain lessons important to the children at different stages.

Many people will not feel they can completely accept this philosophy, as it involves a particular view of man as a

spiritual being but, all the same, the insights provided by Rudolf Steiner can be relevant to parents, particularly in contrast to the 'early learning' methods currently popular. Rudolf Steiner quotes the philosopher Jean Paul:

"We should remember that the child we have to educate bears half his world within him all there and ready taught, namely the spiritual half."

Two recommended books are:

"Education as an Art": Rudolf Steiner and others. Rudolf Steiner Publications, 151 North Moison Road, Blauvelt, New York 10913, USA.

"The Education of the Child": Rudolf Steiner. Rudolf Steiner Press, London.

MONTESSORI

Born in Italy in 1870, Maria Montessori became the first woman doctor in her country's history. Working first with retarded children and the very poor, she observed their development closely and devised a successful system of education to help handicapped children. Later she showed that her approach and equipment were equally stimulating for normal children.

She believed that a child should be allowed freedom to learn by himself at his own pace with a minimum of adult interference. Parents can help this happen by creating a stimulating environment matching their child's particular needs at any time, so that he can teach himself with the minimum of adult correction.

Montessori observed children carefully and designed many materials to suit the stages through which they pass. These are attractive, generally simple and child-sized. They are self-correcting so that if a child makes an error he can see it by studying the material itself.

Some of the materials help the child to acquire the many skills involved in writing and reading - familiarising the child with the shapes of letters using his sense of touch and helping to develop the control of a pencil before trying to write letters and numbers.

Besides reading and writing, the child is introduced to number concepts in a very concrete way, stage by stage, with the help of a series of very simple but effective pieces of apparatus.

A basic introduction to this approach would be:
"Montessori and your child - A primer for parents";
Terry Malloy, Shoken Paperbacks.

Many books written by Maria Montessori herself are available. Among those recently reprinted in paperback by Shoken are:

"Dr Montessori's own Handbook"
"The Montessori Method".

Also, published by Pan:
"The Child in the Family".

For parents educating their children at home and wishing to make use of Montessori materials there are two very helpful books giving directions for making many of them yourself, published by Plume paperbacks:
"Teaching Montessori in the home - the pre-school years" and
"Teaching Montessori in the home - the school years", both by Elizabeth G. Hainstock.

The latter gives suggestions for many exercises in mathematics and some language exercises. It begins with a quotation describing the spirit of the book:

"I hear and I forget,
I see and I remember,
I do and I understand."

PLAYGROUPS

Ideally, playgroups should extend the home experience; providing activities on the basis of a good understanding of the child's needs, allied to a respect for the children's capacity to select those activities which they need. In reality, playgroups can be as structured as infant schools; where the infant's needs are dictated by the adult, and "creative play" is a carefully controlled exercise resulting in an artefact (or product) to take home. There is often an emphasis on number and letter, and the learning (in isolation from practical experience) of shapes, colour and size. If you feel this is important, then you may gain a lot from using a playgroup: or you may make use of it occasionally as a social experience rather than, say, a mini-school.

You may, through your playgroup activities, meet other parents who share your doubts about schooling, and with whom you could continue to co-operate on EO projects as your children grow up. There are many more such people about than you may realise, but many of them do not realise that EO is legal and practicable for them.

Playgroups can have an important "enabling" function - they can be self-help groups which give their members confidence by showing them that they are capable, that they do have an enormous amount to offer their children. As such, they can run counter to the trend of many other organisations in our society (schools included) which emphasise the importance of "professional" qualifications for certain tasks and which therefore tend to discourage people from feeling capable and deter them from taking basic responsibility for important areas of their own lives. Unfortunately, playgroups are becoming increasingly specialised; training for the adults in charge, expensive equipment, etc, and the self-help notion becomes submerged in professionalism. Maybe your contribution could improve a playgroup run along these lines.

Books recommended by EO members:

"Penguin Book of Playgroups": Lucas and McFennall.
"The Playgroup Book": Winnie Porcher, Fontana.
"State of Play": editor Roger Owens. BBC Publications.
"Primary Education": HMSO handbook for teachers.
"Teaching as a Subversive Activity": Postman and Weingarten. Penguin Education Specials.
"Instead of Education": John Holt, Pelican; (and all Holt's books)
"Teacher": Sylvia Ashton, Warner.
"What to do when there's nothing to do": Boston Children's Medical Centre and Elizabeth Press. Arrow Books, 70p.

Useful Addresses

Pre-School Playgroups Association (PPA),
Alford House,
Aveline Street,
London SE11.

Scottish PPA,
192 St Vincent Street,
Glasgow.

The PPA produces several excellent and cheap pamphlets/booklets, including "How to start a Playgroup". Details from addresses above.

As has been said, the transition from "pre-school" age to "primary" age is not an abrupt one, and much of what is written in the Section for 5-12 year-olds applies equally to the under-fives.

The Scottish PPA address above is also the location for the Centre for Under-5s, a new and exciting venture in Glasgow, for anyone concerned with this age group. There is a shop which sells basic materials very cheaply; a kitchen where visitors can make tea; information on play and provision for under-5s and a toy library.

London boroughs often have an under-5's group run on similar lines - e.g. Hackney under-5's, c/o Centreprise, Mare St., London E8. Contact your local town hall.

CHILDREN WITHDRAWN FROM SCHOOL

Children may take some time to recover from the effects of schooling and so you may have (though not necessarily) a difficult transition period.

Children of 5 educated otherwise will be the busy active curious creatures they were at 4, needing little assistance in finding things to absorb or challenge them or in structuring their day. An older child used to school routines may well find a day with no formal structure difficult to bear, if not intolerable. So you may need at first to have a definite routine or timetable, adhered to quite rigidly, so that the child feels secure. Gradually, their self-reliance will return and you can gradually leave behind your timetable and operate in a more natural and easy-going way.

Another likely hangover from schooling will be an aversion to some of the activities they associate with school. The child may for example go for months without wanting to write, because writing at school was a monotonous, enforced and joyless business. There is only one course to follow in such a case - allow them not to write. Eventually the joy and the purposefulness of writing will return, if you allow time to overcome this aversion.

One boy took 2 years after being withdrawn from school before he was willing to make-up stories - the legacy of enforced "creative" writing. His parents read him many stories. These he taped or allowed his mother to write down. But it was another year before he wrote them himself. Now he takes a positive pleasure in inventing stories and writing them down - usually in bed!

Although writing was the hang-up in this case, you may find your child has an aversion to other school activities instead, or as well!

These are some suggestions from a parent for a programme of activities for and with children from 5 to 12. They are intended to help parents who feel unsure about what to do and perhaps unconfident of their ability to do it, anyway. There is no attempt to map out any programme for you to follow, but rather to offer guidance in constructing your own programme.

I will assume, to begin with, that you are beginning otherwise education when your children reach five years, rather than withdrawing them later. Much of what will be said is generally applicable to children withdrawn later but I'll reserve discussion of aspects/problems specific to them later.

First some suggestions about what to read to give yourself confidence and a sense of direction. Alice Yardley has written several books (in the Young Children Learning series, published by Evans) available from libraries, about modern infant school principles and practice. She writes clearly and simply and I would recommend especially "Young Children Thinking" and "Discovering the Real World". These books will show you that teaching-learning is not a mysterious business suitable only for the professionals but an ordinary matter which ordinary people can tackle. "Good" modern infant schools try to be as homely as possible, their activities are not essentially different from what their loving and interested parents would do with, lay on for, their children anyway. The scale and organisation will differ but not much else. For example, Alice Yardley points out that the range of mathematical experience available in an ordinary kitchen is as great as, if not greater than, in an average classroom.

The second bit of basic reading I would recommend is Susan Isaacs Intellectual Growth in Young Children (pub. Routledge & Kegan Paul). This may sound formidable and indeed in its entirety is formidable. But certain key sections are invaluable. It is an account of the "experimental" Malting House School which Isaacs ran in the 1920's. This has been the single most important

influence on modern primary school methods. Looking at Chapter 7 "Four Sample Weeks" and 8 "Summary of Activities" you will be able to see how without formal structures the learning went on purposefully through what to a casual visitor must have appeared random activities and casual interactions. You will also see, even more clearly than from Alice Yardley, that the ordinary activities of ordinary children, freely chosen and supported as necessary by a sensitive adult, constitute an absolutely sound and purposeful education. Also read Chapter 2 "The Educational Technique" where Isaacs explains her principles and practice as a teacher: for example, "we took our cue from the children. When we wanted to introduce new pursuits it was because the children had put out a query in that direction, or because the new experiences were direct and progressive developments of existing interests." In this chapter Isaacs is superbly clear and practical about what it means to give freedom to children in their learning - something that can be said of few writers on "progressive" education. (One note of warning: don't be put off by the high IQ's of her children or the fairly lavish material provision. Neither are essential for employing her very sound approach to education!).

Other reading

John Holt's "What Do I Do Monday" is a very practical book with lots of suggestions for things to do.

Child Education (a monthly magazine for teachers) and its companion Child Education Special (pub. Evans, available through newsagents, the monthly costing 37p) are very useful publications. In each issue a theme is chosen (recent ones include DINOSAURS, ME AND MY BODY, TOWN AND VILLAGE, GROWING THINGS) and activities springing from the theme are suggested from all areas of the primary school curriculum. At the back of an issue is a list of sources (books, museums, kits etc.) is given to help you develop activities around the theme. CES covers specific topics often linked to BBC PROGS. First issue (Aug. 78) was MAGIC: Nativity, Giants, Funfairs.

"SUBJECTS" AREN'T IMPORTANT

One limit (among many) of this document is that it has dealt with activities under traditional school subject headings - it's the most convenient classification. It is also most misleading, since learning does not proceed uniformly in "subjects", and perhaps the major criticism of orthodox schooling is that it artificially divides learning into "subjects".

But don't worry about "covering" all the subjects. Certainly don't try to have a balanced "curriculum" within each week - you'll find that a curious and resourceful child (unschooled or once recovered from schooling) will create a "curriculum" for you as wide-ranging and exhaustive as in any primary school. And at no time does it matter whether what you are doing is Poetry, or Science, or History or all 3 rolled into one - the important thing is what is of interest or benefit (in terms of pleasure and understanding) to the child. Anyway you'll find as you look back over your records of the last few months' "otherwise" activities, that without any very conscious design, there has been an average balance in your educational programme.

1. READING AND WRITING

These are highly emotive topics in our word-obsessed society. You may want to train your child to read from the age of two (see later), or you may want to follow the Steiner principle and wait until he or she reaches 7. This section presents the views of more than one parent.

If the truth be known, reading and writing are skills to be learnt rather than taught. Although schools spend enormous amounts of time and energy in "teaching" them, they are skills which are not particularly difficult for most children to acquire - as long as adult obsessions and anxieties do not make the task seem overwhelming or do not force the child along faster than she needs or wishes to go.

Schools generally regard literacy as a collection of technical skills, and they place these skills at the top of their list of priorities. They make them into ends. Surely a better way of looking at reading and writing is as means to other ends, as tools which give access to certain areas of experience.

In a home where the parents use books, magazines etc, write notes and letters, and read aloud to their children, these children will grow up interested in these processes and able to see their value. Long before they can read they will pretend to do so. They will want to write letters and notices, and will try to shape the letters. They will ask parents to write down their notices for them and perhaps copy them. They will also pick up without effort basic ground rules: eg the left-to-right and top-to-bottom conventions employed in books.

From these early beginnings children (if allowed to) will move naturally and unselfconsciously towards complete competence in literacy, with no sense of working at an onerous task. When they write, it will be because they have something to communicate (not as

in schools because they must practise the skill); letters to grandparents, notices (Private - Keep Out is a general favourite), invitations to parties, messages in bottles. Whereas in many schools teaching of reading begins before the teaching of writing, "otherwise" parents will find that a good deal of writing goes on (with frequent demands to spell out needed words) before the child masters much reading. What better way to learn to read than using words one has written oneself.

A good handwriting book is "The Puffin Book of Lettering" by Tom Gourdie; and see John Holt's section on writing in "What Do I Do Monday?" for practical advice on playing with making letters.

Avoid two traps which educationally-conscious parents are prone to fall into, suggests a parent:

1. Sticking name-cards on <u>every</u> object in the house from the WC to the rubber plant. Your child will either ignore them totally or think you've gone slightly mad.

2. Manufacturing occasions/needs for writing, eg: "Let's write a list of all the nice things you want to do when we go on holiday, dear - in case you forget!"

The child's desire to be like adults and to acquire greater communication skills, plus being bombarded by messages of all kinds from the media, will propel him towards complete literacy. He will do it in his own distinctive manner and order. There is no correct order for learning the various contributing skills. The adult's function is to assist when asked or when he/she feels there is a need which the child is unable to formulate.

Reading Materials

Should one avoid reading schemes? These are based on the assumption that children need to start on simple useful words frequently repeated, and the results is bland and boring books. "Look, Peter, look, look!" The fact is that a five year old mad keen on dinosaurs is more likely to want to know and to remember the word "Iguanodor" than the word "where"; simple and useful "where" may be, but it has no emotional impact.

The best material for a child learning to read is (a) his own writing, (b) writing adults have done at his dictation, (c) ordinary enjoyable simple stories published for children of his age - eg the Picture Puffin series, the Collins Armada, Picture Lions etc. Also well worth considering are the Dr Seuss "Cat in the Hat" series of books for young children, although they have a restricted vocabulary and some parents may find them wearisomely "zany". The child will pick up useful plain words from these because of their sheer frequency, and if it seems appropriate you can help him gain access to a lot of these quite quickly (eg by the use of flashcards). Along with the awful Ladybird Graded Readers, Wills and Hepworth publish a list of Key Words; 100 words which because of their frequency make up some enormous percentage of our total use of words, spoken and written. It might be useful to have a copy of this.

Dr Seuss' "Cat in the Hat Beginners Book Picture Dictionary" is a quirky, amusing book which will help a child who has begun to read to acquire a greater "sight vocabulary".

But some parents find reading schemes useful (if combined with other material and selectively exploited). For example, "Little Nippers", "Breakthrough", "Rangers and Nash". "Resources for Reading" (Methuen) is a series of graded books rather than a set scheme. The Reading Centre (Reading -

where else - Berks) will send a booklist appropriate to the child's ability.

You can also obtain samples from educational publishers.

It is possible to train a child to read from the age of two, and some beleive that the earlier the better. The best known exponent of this idea is Glen Doman, in "Teach your Baby to Read", (Pan Child Development series 1975). He suggests that very young children want to read and should be encouraged to do so.

Older children might enjoy working on formal English papers (such as Nelson 2nd Year papers in English, or Ridout: English Workbooks).

Some hints about recognising new words

Children find out what new words on a page say by either:

1) asking someone who knows, or
2) working out, from their knowledge of letter-sounds and their knowledge of the rules governing their interaction, what total sound the combination of letters make. (This is known as using "phonics")

The first method roughly speaking is appropriate to irregular words and the second to regular, though the child will gradually begin to spot regularities and patterns in the irregular words too.

Phonics

A child will need to know the sound of all the letters in the alphabet. It is more helpful if she gets to know them first by their sounds rather than their names, and in their lower case form rather than as capitals. Knowing the sound of the following letter combinations is equally important:

ai (as in train); aw (saw); ay (say); ch (chin); ck (back); ea (sea); ee (tree); er (her); ew (new); ng (king); oa (boat); oo (room); ou (out); ow (cow); ph (phone); sh (shop); th (this); wh (when).

These are the most important or "regular" but not the only sounds these letter combinations make. When they make irregular sounds, as with individual letter-sounds, these can be explained as they occur.

Also important is the effect of "e" at the end of a word: it lengthens the previous vowel - eg cam/came; shin/shine; rod/rode; tub/tube. These and other phonic rules can be introduced and examples given when occasion demands, ie when the child is encountering a problem for which she needs the rule. There are a number of television programmes which could help in this area.

The key to helping a child to read is to remember that every child will have her own way of tackling it. Some suddenly are able to read fluently overnight when the previous day there was no sign that they knew anything of the process. Much more likely is that the road to mastery will take some time.

Don't be in a hurry! Many children in schools are pushed at reading before they are ready and there begins a cumulative record of failure. Like Susan Isaacs, remember that a practical sense of the value of reading and writing is more important than early cultivation of technical proficiency. And be warned by the following quotation:-

> "A mental age of 7 appears to be the level at which the child's mental structures are sufficiently developed to allow some degree of success" in realising "the interrelationships of words and sounds... Even with a mental age of 9, some children still make errors that suggest they have difficulty in realising the position of

sounds within words and how to analyse words into sounds." (from "The Challenge of Informal Education" by Moira MacKenzie and Wendla Kernig, published by Darton, Longman and Todd. Might be worth quoting to some LEAs!)

Expect that a child's interest in reading and writing will fluctuate as do all her other interests. She may not want to do any for weeks or even months. I think that should be respected. Often when a child returns to an interest after a period of apparent neglect, it is clear that learning has been going on silently "underground".

One important qualification that must be made to my general message (that learning to read and write is not difficult for most children) is that there are some children for whom it is difficult because they suffer from specific learning disabilities - the best known of these being "dyslexia". Here the difficulties are created by specific perceptual difficulties the child has.

However, it is important to bear in mind that dyslexia may be a convenient label which disguises (a) the failure of the teacher to understand the child's learning problem, or (b) an emotional or other block which prevents the child from learning to read. We must not be too easily led into accepting a professional diagnosis and pronouncement of a 'condition' which may have no basis in reality at all. (It's not for nothing that Lewis Carroll described the process as 'reeling and writhing'!)

That said, you may feel that your child has a genuine perceptual difficulty. The first point to make is that as a parent doing otherwise education you are far more likely to notice such difficulties than a teacher dealing with thirty children.

I attach below a brief outline of the symptoms of dyslexia, from the Scottish Association for the Study

of Dyslexia:

> "The simplest way to recognise the specific learning difficulty known as developmental dyslexia is to be aware of a discrepancy between a child's general, overall ability and her/his clear difficulty with coding and sequencing symbols (letters and numbers) when she/he is at the age when other children are coping with these same symbols. If a child is handicapped by a vision or hearing loss, or an emotional state, then naturally this "discrepancy" may not be so easy to detect, and it is usually the dyslexic who has a variety of problems who goes "undetected" by teachers and parents. Signs which can indicate a dyslexic pattern of perception - but do not necessarily - are the following: persistent confusion re right and left; difficulty learning to tell the time; reversal of syllables in speech; reversal of letter-order when reading; reversal of letter-shapes when reading and/or writing (eg db; un; mw; etc); confusion between opposites - up/down; under/over; before/after - inability to sequence isolated sounds taps, rythms, letters, eg sequence of words like multiplications tables; confusion re time of the day, months of the year; days of the week."

If you suspect that your child might suffer from dyslexia you should contact:

The British Dyslexia Association, 18 The Circus, Bath, Avon. Tel Bath 2080 (office open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays 10.00 - 4.00)

The Scottish Association for the Study of Dyslexia. Telephone Edinburgh 3320379 (mornings only) for advice and help.

2. POETRY

If you feel this is something that has to be conciously encouraged, rather than just assuming that it will be expressed along with everything else - then perhaps the most obvious thing is to read it aloud. There are many good anthologies:-

"The Young Puffin Book of Verse"; "Time for Rhyme" (for three years up): both edited by Barbara Ireson. Puffin.
"Junior Voices": edited Geoffrey Summerfield (four volumes), Penguin.
"Four Feet and Two": edited Leila Berg, Penguin.
"Puffin Quartet of Poets": Farjeon, Reeves, Fein, Serraillier.
"Secret Laughter": Walter de la Mare.
"A Child's Garden of Verses": R.L. Stevenson.
"The Oxford Book of Children's Verse" (poems for a wide age range).

Poetry can be taped as well as written down - or put to music, perhaps? You may be able to get recordings from a library.

3. ARTS & CRAFTS

Art and Craft in Education (pub. Evans, monthly, now 30p, and available through newsagents) will provide enormous numbers of ideas for things to do in art and craft with children of any age and forthcoming for 7-11's there is JUNIOR EDUCATION magazine.

There are endless art and craft activities: drawing, painting, printing, collage, modelling, sewing, spinning and weaving, that children can enjoy from an early age. They can be tied in with other projects, with explanations, with keeping a record, with seasonal events - and most important, they allow self-expression.

Photography can be an interesting starting point, too. John Holt describes how 5 year olds took lovely pictures using Polaroids (expensive to operate), old box cameras, instamatics - or, if you can get chemicals and paper, try making photograms, or taking pictures using a cardboard box and a "pinhole". See FUN WITH TRICK PHOTOGRAPHY by David Webster.

Also, LADYBIRD "Woodwork", and LET'S PAINT (Craft Series).

In London you may be able to order equipment through the GLC if you can join with a larger group (playgroup? food co-op? bulk buy group?) and this might be true elsewhere. CHILDSPLAY, 112 Tooting High St., SW17 have a catalogue of inexpensive equipment. Some under-5's groups will sell cheaper stock.

Other resources Free paper from printers: large factories; computer firms.

4. MUSIC

A parent once asked a famous musician/musicologist/teacher: "My two year old is very musical. What can I do for her?" "For God's sake leave her be" he replied. Then, when pressed, he suggested having lots of different music around to listen to, and singing together. "The Puffin Song Book" contains lots of well-known nursery and folk songs, with simple musical accompaniment. 3-4-5 records are rhymes sung in natural children's voices (rather than sub-operatic-type ones) and there are many others.

Children can make very simple instruments themselves, and often get a lot out of using a piano entirely untutored. Then there a visits to concerts (in London there are regular children's concerts at the Festival Hall); radio 3; a local choir; records from the library.

Some parents advocate the Suzuki method of teaching children to play stringed instruments. This approach is outlined in:

> "Nurtured by Love: A new approach to education": Shinichi Suzuki, Exposition Press, New York.
> "Suzuki Education in Action": Clifford A.Cook, Exposition Press, New York.

Recommended Books:

For younger children:-

> "Growing up with Music": Mary Pope, OUP. An outstanding book. Practical and specific, but placing ideas for activities in the context of the child's overall musical development.

Practical suggestions for many activities are to be found in either:

> "Musical Activities with Young Children": Joan Gilbert, Ward Locke Educational; it also has a useful list of song books and further reading;

or "Activities in Music with Children under Six": Margaret Hope-Brown, Evans' Education in Action series.

For 8-12 year olds:

"Children Make Music" and "Make Music" (for teacher and child respectively): Richard Addison. A sound and inspiring guide. If you feel ignorant about music, start by reading the children's book!

" Easy Stretch Guitar - New method for the complete beginner": David Pairman, Galliard.

It's not beyond anyone without musical experience to learn to play a recorder with their children. Good recorder tutors are easily available, eg. "The School Recorder Book": Priestley and Fowler.

Again, as with everything else, the main point seems to be to make music and to enjoy it, rather than to be trained to produce other people's music from too young an age.

Dance is a natural parallel, and need not be formalised into ballet or tap lessons. Music and movement, mime, acrobatics, yoga - all are activities to be enjoyed with children without special qualifications (except perhaps in the case of yoga).

Drama: There seems to be a dearth of dramatic activities for children. You may find a sporadic drama workshop in your nearest city (in London the Unicorn Theatre Club, Great Newport Street WC2 may be able to give details of other cities; as might the Anna Scher Company, London N1. Could parents let us know of places they come across?).

Visits to the ballet, the opera, or the theatre can spark off a chain reaction in all sorts of other activities.

5. MATHS

Many adults look back with pain to their own maths education and would find the thought of "teaching" maths to someone else very offputting. Additionally, they are confused about school maths, which is now completely different. It's "New Maths".

It is difficult to give very precise guidance about how to tackle maths, as there are two distinct approaches.

One is to let the child's mathematical understanding, like Topsy, "just grow and grow". The child's curiosity about the living world will involve him in counting, weighing, measuring, etc. Science activities inevitably involve mathematics. And so do children's practical "making" activities. At Susan Isaac's school, "If they wanted more stuff for sewing, a new mat for the school steps, new ladders or curtains for the windows, we asked them to measure up the quantities or sizes required. When they wanted to make cakes, they bought the ingredients, counted the change, and weighed out the things themselves."

The other, while agreeing with the enormous value of such activities for mathematical understanding, is to say that you will also need maths lessons as such, since maths is a structured and sequential body of ideas.

Basic principles whichever approach you adopt:

1. The development and mastery of mathematical ideas is not something that can take place simply in the head. Children move towards them by playing with simple materials, arranging them, and talking about what they see in doing this. Maths is learnt through the hands and the tongue.

2. Since physical and manipulative experience is so fundamental, it follows clearly that mathematical understanding cannot be rushed. If you try you are initiating a train of failure your child will find is virtually impossible to recover from.

3. Sums are not the be-all and end-all of maths. They are simply a way of recording an experience or discovery. There are different and equally valid ways of recording:
   a) orally
   b) in written words
   c) in written numbers (sums)

   There is no reason why the third should always be used. And a note of warning! Young children need to be introduced gradually to these methods in that order, and it is vital that they are not pushed onto the third prematurely.

Useful materials

1. Books:

   Mathematics for Schools - Harold Fletcher (pub Addison-Wesley) - Pupils books and Teacher's Resource Books.

   Nuffield Mathematics Project - Teacher's Guides (Pub W & R Chambers). A parent writes (of vols 1 & 2): "Very useful and clear guide. I have started to see maths as describing processes rather than as the mechanical repetition of techniques."

   Alpha Arithmetic Series - Teachers and Pupils books. Less good than the two above but useful for parents who fell clueless about "New Maths".

   Mathematics in the Primary School by members of the Association of Teachers of Mathematics (Cambridge University Press) and

Mathematics in the Primary School - Schools Council, Curriculum Bulletin No. 1 (HMSO) are both authoritative accounts of the basic principles of modern mathematical learning. Clear and useful.

2. TV Maths Programmes: there are a variety of these. But some find them too fast, too abstract. Others find them patronisingly, unremittingly "entertaining". The worksheets provided with the programmes may be helpful.

3. Measuring devices: eg Kitchen and bathroom scales, measuring jugs, medicine spoons, tape measures, easy-to-read clocks etc.

Metric measurements are taking over, but you might want to stick to pounds and ounces, on the grounds that these are the weights that your child encounters in everyday life. As one parent points out, it is the principle of weighing that is important and she feels that new units can be easily learned later on when appropriate.

4. Cuisenaire or Colour Factor Rods: (slightly different versions of same thing.) Ingeniously simple piece of equipment, designed to help children absorb a series of basic mathematical concepts through the pores, by playing with and manipulating coloured rods of various lengths. DO read the accompanying leaflet/instructions and use accordingly (allowing the child just to play with the rods) and NOT as an aid to getting "sums" right!

And do allow children to use them as playthings from a very early age before using them as a maths aid. Playing games is a good maths aid, too - such as Snakes and Ladders (with two dice), chess, draughts, ludo, cards.

Colour Factor Pods available from: E.J. Arnold, Leeds.

Cuisenaire Pods available from: Cuisenaire Company, 40 Silver St., Reading.

(Or both available through educational suppliers/shops such as E.J. Arnold, who incidentally publish free an enormous catalogue of "educational equipment", much of it unnecessary, but it serves to give you an idea of what's available.)

Below is an outline of some important activities and concepts in various areas of mathematics.

Counting

Counting rote fashion does not imply understanding. A child who can count to 20 but does not understand that 20 is 2 groups or sets of 10 needs to "play" with the numbers much more. Also, be careful to avoid teaching number in the absence of real objects or teaching number in counting order; instead, let the child meet numbers at random, as in life.

Ways of counting: implements when laying the table, buttons, people, flowers, shoping, etc

Arranging: put objects in order of size, eg beads, boxes, buttons, cutting different lengths of paper

Games:
a) counting and singing games and rhymes
b) targets - throwing at scoreboards
c) skittles
d) cards, dice, dominoes etc.

Need to understand eg the fourness of four i.e.

$4 = 1 + 1 + 1 + 1$
$4 = 3 + 1$
$4 = 2 + 2$
$4 = 2 + 1 + 1$

This needs to be done in as many different ways from 2 - 9 inclusive. Cuisenaire rods can be used.

Ordering: 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc.

Representation: eg a) figure 3
b) spoken and written three
c) many possible physical arrangements and patterns of three objects.

Trace figures, copy, complete uncompleted figures.

When these concepts are understood then "place value" may be grasped, ie:

17

means

1 ten and 7 units

An understanding of place value is needed when recording, comparing, adding, subtracting etc.

Capacity and Weight

Water play (or dried peas or sand) is necessary to understand conservation, ie 100ml of water is the same quantity whatever the shape of the container.

Cooking - marvellous mathematical experience as it requires weighing, measuring liquids and counting.

Shopping - Compare weights and quantities. Learn that size and shape are not always a guide to weight.
"Feel" and guess names.

Money Shopping, counting with real money, giving change.

Balance and Symmetry Patterns and tesselations.

Measurement Compare different lengths and distances. Need to know the terminology ie height, length, width. Give children a tape measure - show how to use and record. Arrange objects in height, length.

Shapes Collect containers and cut out shapes. Count corners, edges, faces, sides etc. Name shapes and solids.

Graphs See "Pictorial Representation - 1" :Nuffield Maths Project (Chambers and Joohn Murray).

Time

Have a simple clock and toy teaching-time clock. Note times you do things eg get up, have lunch, watch TV, etc. Use Radio and TV Times - look up times of programmes.

Fractions

You could tackle these by using Cuisenaire, or looking for everyday examples such as cutting a cake into 6, and talking about one-sixth or five-sixths. However, John Holt ("What Do I Do Monday?" under 'Fractions and other Bugaboos') thinks it is a mistake to use pies and pie diagrams because these only work for pies and are not illustrative of fractions in general. He adds that he doesn't think children should be 'taught' fractions... they should meet and work with them in the course of their real work with numbers.

Recommended: "Let's Play Maths" by Michael Holt and Zoltan Dienes (Penguin).

6. SCIENCE

Science with young children is primarily concerned with gathering experience. "They have a natural curiosity about their surroundings and almost any work or play that concerns exploration of their environment results in learning with understanding." (from "Science 5-13", see below). 'Otherwise' science activities are likely to be just like this, and it will help you if you have an understanding of what learnings or benefits they are getting from their activities. Alice Yardley's "Discovering the Physical World" is excellent for younger children.

For the whole primary age range consult "Science 5-13 With Objectives in Mind" which explains rigorously and comprehensively the sort of scientific concepts which are available to children between 5 and 13, and what sort of experiences are likely to help children acquire them. Then there are two books specifically on infant science: "Early Experiments" and "Early Explorations". There are a host of project books, with topics like "Minibeasts", "Metals", "Holes and Cavities", "Trees", "Structures and Forces"; each of these suggest a plethora of possible science investigations.

Also useful (and very cheap) are the "Ladybird Junior Science Books"; good information books for the 8-12 year old or for the ignorant parent. They contain useful suggestions for activities and experiments (explaining exactly what equipment you will need).

Some parents recommend the USBORNE books (for 8-11 or younger), such as:

"Children's Guide to the Earth"
"Dinosaurs"
"Prehistoric Mammals"
"Insects",

or the Macdonald Science Starters (55p).

You could try a chemistry set, and watch the science programmes in the schools TV series. Local museums can be a good starting point too. Cooking has been found to be a simple everyday scientific activity that children enjoy.

Useful, cheap and fun is "Science Experiments you can Eat": Vicki Cobb, Penguin. Three excellent teacher's books are:

"Scientific Interests in the Primary School": Froebel Institute.
"Science in Primary Schools": HMSO
UNESCO Source Book for Science Teaching.

It's worth remembering that science isn't a very special activity. It includes the whole natural and man-made world - all the things and processes (animate and inanimate) that can be perceived through all our senses. The aim of science activities is really to heighten the children's awareness of and sense of wonder at their experience of the physical world. It is a feeling as well as thinking activity, and in that sense akin to poems and stories, music, history, geography - or any so-called "subject".

7. HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY

I doubt that you will do history and geography at all in the way conventional schools do them. First hand experience is more valuable to children than dry information about far-away times and places.

At Susan Isaac's school: "Geography grew out of their modelling, gardening and weather observations and their country excursions". It was rooted in actual experience and the questions that sprang from it.

However children are also interested in things and people far away in place and time and will have ample fuel for their curiosity from television, museums, atlases and books. Stories set in far-off places and times will often lead children to want to know more about those places and times. Rosemary Sutcliff is an excellent writer of historical fiction, and some of her many books will be enjoyed by the 7-12 year olds, others being written more for the teenage/adult reader.

Discussion is fundamental, about people and the part they played in shaping the child's own life. This may lead to some sort of chart, coloured or labelled, to hang on the wall and which eventually might become a scrap book.

One parent has successfully used a study kit produced by the local Record Office (on crime and punishment 1700-1900, for example), and recommends the Ladybird "Lives" series, as well as "People of the Past" (Macdonald).

Mapping the environment is a nice geographical activity; it can be the number of trees in your garden, or the houses in your street. The adult Open University course "Art and the Environment" has a stimulating section on mapping which is perfectly suitable for 7 year olds upwards! You could probably get the material from your local OU study centre

(this course has lots of ideas for projects in general, mainly concerned with exploring the imagination).

Making a family tree, or visiting the nearest ancient ruin, are two starts to make.

LONDON APPENDIX

For those who live in London, the following resources may be helpful.

1. All museums and art galleries (many of which have special programmes for children, including workshops, in the holidays).

2. Your local community resource centre e.g. Battersea Arts Centre.

3. London Zoo season tickets cost £6.50 per year and admit the holder plus one adult guest, or 2 unaccompanied children under 16. The Zoo is half price on the 1st Sat. of every month except June, July and August.

4. Publications:

Parents' Guide to Children's London (Nicholson 95p).
TIME OUT magazine - children's section (weekly)
SNAKES AND LADDERS - a directory of children's activities compiled by the Westminster Play Assocn., 16-20 Strutton Ground SW1.

Some of these facilities may exist in other cities.

CONCLUSION

Remember that you do not need to feel alone when seeking ideas/guidance about activities/educational principles in your otherwise programme. There are a number of sources for these, including:

1. Other Otherwise families.

2. Your neighbour - there may be someone living near you who would welcome the opportunity to talk to a child, or pass on a skill of craft.

3. Teachers or Lecturers in Colleges of Education - you may know some or if not it's not difficult to find some. You may be surprised at how many of them are sympathetic to what you are doing.

4. Radio and TV programmes, including but not only schools broadcasts series if you know in advance what is coming. BBC Publications, School Orders Section, 144 Bermondsey St., London SE1 (01-407-5762/3/4) will supply a booklet "BBC Radio and TV Annual Programmes for Schools and Colleges" (usually available each spring). From this you can see what is likely to be useful, and if appropriate order booklets etc which accompany programmes you intend to use.

5. Librarians and Museum Curators, whose capacity and willingness to help you find out what you are looking for is by and large grossly underrated and underused.

6. Local Education Authority Advisers - one will presumably be keeping an eye on your activities and I see no earthly reason why you can't consult him. Sometimes advisers inspecting "otherwise" programmes will without provocation offer to advise about materials, methods, books, etc. After all that is their job!

It is hoped that this guide will be regularly revised, and that your suggestions will keep it flexible, practical and widely based.

Suggestions and contributions should be sent to the address inside the front cover.

EDUCATION OTHERWISE
The Manor House, Thelnetham, Diss, Norfolk

Education Otherwise is a membership organisation whose principal aim is to provide a support and information network for families whose children are being educated out of school, for those who are contemplating such a step, and for those who wish to support the freedom of families to take proper responsibility for the education of children.

Our principle aims are as follows:

To encourage the provision of alternative learning situations outside the school system for those children who are not benefitting from school.

To re-affirm that parents have the primary responsibility for their children's education and that they have the right to exercise this responsibility by educating them out of school.

To establish the primary right of children that full consideration, with due allowance for their age and understanding, shall be given to their wishes and feelings regarding their education.

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