



## ABCs and 123s: What's Appropriate

Many parents are concerned when their children aren't practicing letters and numbers. They feel that completing paper and pencil exercises will most effectively prepare their children for elementary school.

Preschools could give your children workbooks and make them memorize the alphabet. Your children could be drilled and tested. If preschools did operated this way, however, your children would lose something very important.

Children who are rushed into reading and writing too soon miss important steps in learning and may suffer later on because they lack the foundation they need for using language. Children who are taught to read before they are ready may be able to sound out and recognize words, but they may also have little understanding of what they are reading. If they haven't been given time to play, they won't have explored objects enough to know what words (like "hard, harder, hardest") mean. If they aren't allowed to string beads, button, dress up, cut, paste, pour, and draw, they won't develop the small muscle skills they need for writing.

Because math involves more than memorizing facts (such as  $2+2=4$ )—because it involves logical thinking--children shouldn't be pushed into paper and pencil arithmetic too soon. To acquire the foundation for logical thinking, children need many opportunities to count objects, sort them into piles, add some to a pile and take some away. It is by playing games like these that they will learn to understand what is meant by addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication. Without concrete experiences, children may give correct answers but may not really understand what they are doing and why.

Probably most important of all, if children are rushed into academic subjects too soon, they may lose their enthusiasm for learning as well as their sense of themselves as learners. If children are told what to learn and memorize by the teacher, they may become passive and dependent learners, unexcited about learning something new. Children who have had plenty of time to play, however, learn to ask their own questions and figure out their own answers. They are responsible for their own learning. They see themselves as explorers, discoverers, problem solvers and inventors.