

Pre-reading and spelling skills



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Introduction

“Reading is more than seeing words clearly, more than pronouncing printed words correctly, more than recognising the meaning of isolated words. Reading requires you to think, feel and imagine.” (Ruth Strang)

Becoming school ready is a complex concept that means that a learner is “learning ready” when he is able to comply with the minimum requirements and has developed the minimum skills necessary to experience success and make progress in the school environment.

In order for a learner to be successful in learning to read and spell accurately, he needs to be competent in the following:

- Gross and fine motor skills
- Age appropriate emotional development
- Be able to cope socially in the school environment
- Have good visual and auditory perception
- Have a good concept of numbers
- Be able to reason on a concrete, semi-concrete and abstract level
- Be able to distinguish between left and right
- Be able to cross his midline
- Have a good sense of spatial orientation
- Have good use of vocabulary
- Be able to recall rhymes, songs, home address, etc

Learning readiness needs to be seen as a process and not a single event. Pre-reading and spelling skill development begins at birth and goes hand-in-hand with the sequential stages of development in children. When a child is provided with sufficient opportunities to develop healthily, he is usually school ready by the compulsory school age.

1. The following are factors affecting learning readiness:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| * Health | * Nutrition |
| * Routine | * Low muscle tone |
| * Skipping of developmental phases | * Parents attitude towards learning |
| * Socio-economic circumstances | * Attitudes toward gender |
| * Trauma | * Language ability |

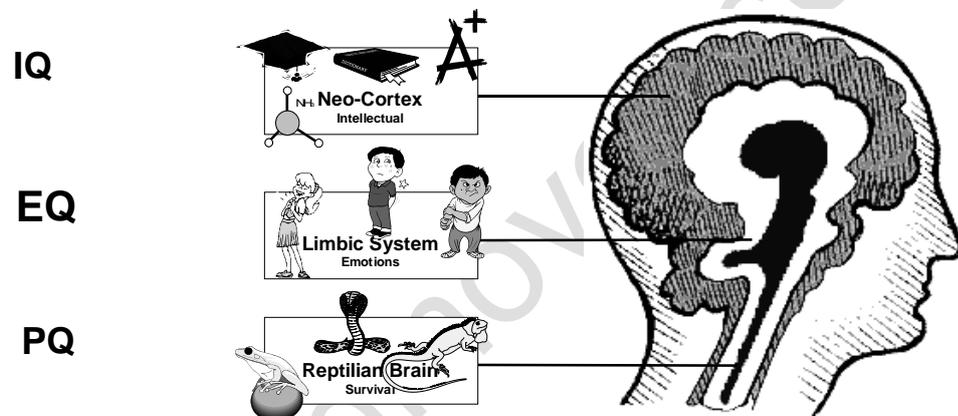


These factors can either enhance or inhibit the process of achieving a state of learning readiness. When a learner cannot see or hear well, is over-active, sickly or whose natural perceptual development seems to be inhibited for whatever reason, then he may well not be ready for learning at the expected time (regardless of ample opportunity being provided). Such a learner would require professional or other assistance in order to aid him in the normal process of school preparation.

2. The role of the Triune Brain

A learner's level of development in the following three areas will indicate whether he is ready for learning to read and spell.

1. Physical development (PQ)
2. Emotional development (EQ)
3. Intellectual development (IQ)



A learner who has not yet reached an age appropriate level of maturation often displays the need to play. This can be an indication that he is not yet emotionally ready to meet the demands that are being made on him, he is unable to orientate himself in order to complete tasks and may tire easily in the formal teaching situation.

When a learner is physically prepared for school, he has the ability to meet demands which are made on him. He is able to hold his pencil with ease and can also sit still long enough for him to concentrate and learn. Such a learner is not only able to learn, but is also capable of listening to and carrying out instructions.

When a learner is physically independent, he develops a positive self-concept, confidence and assertiveness. The result of these skills is that the learner will have a good sense of safety, healthy risk-taking and learning readiness. Learning skills do not only refer to academic skills, but also includes the making of friends (shows that the learner has the emotional maturity to get along with others). Motivation and memory are the emotional and social skills which act as glue to join the head (thinking) with the heart (feeling).

Other than physical and emotional readiness, a learner also needs to be intellectually and perceptually ready for school. A learner should be able to distinguish between left and right, understand spatial concepts like “behind, besides, in front of ...” and show comprehension of numerical concepts such as bigger/smaller, more/less as well as numbers. These skills enable a learner to make sense of his experiences, think about them, make plans and respond appropriately.

Besides being physically, emotionally and intellectually ready, a young learner might still face various barriers to learning.



3. What influences reading and spelling readiness?

- The ability to hear and see well.
- The ability to speak fluently and use vocabulary accurately
- The ability to listen to instructions
- The ability to listen with understanding
- The ability to follow simple instructions
- The ability to remember what he's seen
- The ability to remember what he's heard
- The ability to remember what he's learnt

4. The importance of visual perception skills

“The eyes look, but the brain ‘sees’” (de Jager. 2006). A learner has mastered his visual perception skills when he is able to sort, match and classify objects according to shape, colour, size, texture and position, as well as be able to recognise differences and similarities in pictures, letters and words.

Visual perception includes skills such as:

- Visual discrimination – the ability to see differences between pictures, letters, words and numbers that are similar in appearance, e.g. 6 / 9.
- Foreground-background discrimination – the ability to isolate a figure that may be in the foreground or background of a picture by focusing on one object at a time. Activities such as cutting, colouring-in, reading and spelling require figure-ground discrimination.
- Visual memory – the ability to recall visual images. This is an important skill as learners need to be able to recognise sight words.
- Visual sequencing – the ability to see letters in order, e.g. b-a-t = bat.

- a. Speak to them often.
- b. Listen to what they have to say.
- c. Avoid “baby” language.
- d. Allow them to tell you what they want – do not anticipate their needs.
- e. Play games together.
- f. Read books together – discuss the pictures / story line.
- g. Take them on outings.
- h. Afford them plenty of time to socialise with other children.

It is essential to note that when entering school, a learner may have attained varying degrees of learning readiness in the different areas. The variation in areas of development will impact on his success at school.

In order to assess whether a learner is learning ready or not, it is important to form a picture of the whole child, taking all aspects into consideration.



8. Questionnaire: Is your learner ready for reading?

If you are able to answer ‘yes’ to most of these questions, then your learner may well be ready for reading:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| * Is he able to concentrate throughout a short story? | Yes | No |
| * Is he able to match pictures that are similar? | Yes | No |
| * Is he able to match shapes that are similar? | Yes | No |
| * Can he express himself using appropriate language? | Yes | No |
| * Does he have a good vocabulary? | Yes | No |
| * Can he tell a story in the correct sequence? | Yes | No |
| * Can he recall songs and rhymes? | Yes | No |
| * Does he recognise his own name in print? | Yes | No |
| * Is he able to identify one or more letters of the alphabet? | Yes | No |
| * Does he recognise the way words are set out on paper?
(Left to right; top to bottom) | Yes | No |
| * Does he show interest in books? | Yes | No |
| * Does he show an interest in reading? | Yes | No |



9. Fun games to play to encourage reading and spelling skills

As a result of learners being unique individuals, they all learn to read and spell in different ways. By employing various teaching methods, learning becomes a more enjoyable activity. Below is just a few of the many games which can be played in order to encourage young learners to develop reading and spelling skills:

1. I spy ...
2. Memory Card Games
3. Look and Say games with flash cards
4. What's that sound?
5. What comes next? Sequencing cards
6. Name puzzles e.g. birth + day = birthday
7. Broken Telephone
8. Listen and imitate

10. Enhancing pre-reading and spelling skills with Mind Moves

Spatial orientation is essential for reading and spelling. Well stimulated eyes, ears and vestibular system provide the foundation upon which knowledge can be added.



Mouse Pad



Antennae Adjuster



Temporal Toner



Bilateral Walk

Communication is at the heart of a child's development, be it cognitive, social, emotional or behavioural.

L.S. Vygotsky

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