

**PROJECT ABLE:
A PERCEPTUAL-MOTOR DEVELOPMENTAL ORIENTED
EXPERIMENT FOR THE PHYSIOLOGICALLY
IMMATURE FIRST GRADER**

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Project Able is a program designed by the Three Village Central School District in Setauket, New York to provide youngsters of comparable chronological ages but with deficiencies in physiological maturation as expressed by visual perception and motor-coordination developmental lags with a highly individualized curriculum. It is essentially a preventive, developmental approach to reading focused at the first grade level.

The need for such a program became critical in the district due to tremendous population growth in the district within a very short period of time. As the numbers of students in first grade increased, a significant number were not ready for the cognitive types of learning required by the schools. The sole basis for school admission in the district is chronological age.

Surveys show that a wide variance of school admission age policies exist in the United States. Exceptions to the age criteria on a nationwide basis depend greatly on mental maturity, total development of the child, and social and emotional development. Geographical areas leading in the lowering of school admission age are the Great Lakes region, the Plains States, and the Northeast.

Motor learning, which is a key concept in Project Able, refers specifically to types of behavioral change which involve bodily movement. This definition lends itself to

evaluation by singling out behavior which can be objectively observed.

Research indicates that motor skills are not developed until the child's neuromuscular system is sufficiently ready. When the necessary maturational level has been reached, the response will be made. However, emergence of these skills is not automatic. Training can be easier and faster if a child has reached a state of full physiological readiness.

The role of the teacher and parent in promoting motor skill learning is to determine the time at which children are ready to learn particular skills and to provide an optimum learning condition. Knowing when to introduce a particular skill is often critical to its development.

Most authorities agree that size and weight measurements tend to reflect physical growth whereas skeletal age is a better index to developmental age. Secondary sex characteristics are not helpful indicators of maturational age with kindergarteners and first graders. The best hope appears to rest on tests for mental maturity and testing in motor skills for physical maturity at this level.

The perceptual process in reading involves all of the complexities of perception in general. In Kephart's view the perceptual aspect involves the identification and recognition of a word on the printed page, and the recognition of a geometric form and its association with a word. Only recently have the perceptual aspects of reading gained their proper consideration.

Reading is a perceptual art as well as a language art. The interpretation of the printed page requires the same type of structuring which the child's interpretation of the concrete universe about him requires. If this structuring does not occur, reading will be difficult.

Evaluation and analysis of standardized test data shows very clearly that Project Able was unsuccessful in attempting to develop Word Knowledge and Word Discrimination as measured by the Metropolitan Achievement Test, Primary I Battery through the perceptual-motor approach.

But, the significant difference in favor of the Project Able group on Reading (Comprehension) indicates that the perceptual-motor technique has merit as measured by the same test.

In weighing the overall effectiveness of Project Able subjective evaluation must also be considered since the Project's objectives were much broader than simply statistical analysis. Most of the original objectives were met to a great degree and Project Able would have to rank as a qualified success.

Project Able was an attempt to meet the needs of young children who were not ready to function successfully in a regular first grade situation. Until schools develop a more realistic and scientific basis for school entrance requirements ever-increasing numbers of students will be frustrated by formal schooling.

Much has been said and written about the importance of

individual differences but until greater recognition of developmental age and sex differentials in learning are taken into consideration by schools, we cannot make honest progress towards individualization of instruction.