

Pre-K — what's that?

By Edie Jones
Columnist

Your child's education and development doesn't start when she walks through the doors into kindergarten. In fact, much of your child's critical development takes place before kindergarten starts.

There is much every parent can do to assure their child has an "educated" beginning and is prepared for kindergarten. The research is adamant about the importance of the first five years of a child's life in terms of brain development. What nurtures that development are experiences — those provided by loving parents and caregivers.

When parents set aside time each day to investigate the world with their young child — and encourage an endless list of questions — they are fostering an enthusiasm for learning, a very necessary quality for starting school.

When children participate in activities such as those found in places like Annie's Studio, where Annie Painter encourages exploration and inquisitiveness, they are learning to become aware of their surroundings. At the same time they are discovering new ways of looking at the world, forming hypotheses and checking them out, the beginning framework for learning about science.

Annie, herself a former elementary school principal, expressed concern that the increased focus on academic achievement can result in an early childhood where childhood itself may be at risk. As a principal, and now as an arts provider, Annie believes that all children have a right to the fullest possible development, a right to enjoy childhood in all its wonder.

Academic skills? Of course. But childhood development for this former principal means block play, the sand-box, the dress-up corner, the rhythm band, dancing, singing, inventing, chatting, pretending and creating.

All of these are areas a parent can provide at home, nurturing brain development while preparing their child for kindergarten.

A link from the Harvard Center for the Developing Child shows a video of a Ted's Talk presentation, emphasizing what happens when parents engage their children in conversation. It uses the example of how building with blocks together and talking about all that is happening builds language and vocabulary, a precursor to reading. The video compares this to the lack of readiness of children deprived of similar exchanges or those immersed in screen-time.

Lisa Mosier, an award-winning kindergarten teacher from Wisconsin, says, "Children need wide background knowledge about their world and the words to go with it." Sandra Waite-Stupiansky, co-author of several Scholastic Learning Through Play books, reports that research shows that a well-developed verbal vocabulary is one of the best predictors of later reading success. The message: Talk to your kids and use new words. Words that describe, question and encourage

problem-solving.

Children also need to come to kindergarten being able to listen, a skill that is developed when parents read to them on a regular basis. Besides building vocabulary and helping kids comprehend ideas, reading develops attention skills. Asking open-ended questions about what they think happened in a story and being animated while reading helps build interest in what is being read. Using rhyme and repetitive phrases helps develop phonemic awareness (the ability to hear and break down sounds in words), which lead to greater understanding when learning to read.

The ability to play well with others by developing strong social/emotional skills and self-regulation are most important in being ready for kindergarten. Sharing, compromising, turn-taking, and problem-solving skills need to be well developed by this milestone age. When parents demonstrate these in everyday situations, they are fostering their growth.

Arranging play-dates and outings with other children creates opportunities where kids learn to handle difficult situations, face challenges and solve problems on their own. Helping them become aware when friends are sad or upset builds compassion and empathy.

Do you remember when you learned to cut or hold a pencil? All of these abilities

need to be in place before formal schooling begins. Having kids string beads or Cheerios on pipe cleaners requires them to pinch their fingers, the same motion needed for grasping a pencil. Misting with a spray bottle or picking up pieces of paper with a clip-style clothespin builds the muscles needed for cutting. These are small but important things parents can do in their "pre-K" environments.

Letter and number recognition are important. No flash cards or drills, just teach in fun related ways such as finding the letters of their name in words in a book or counting the number of red cars seen as you drive along. It is hoped that they can count sequentially, at least up to 10, preferably to 20, identify numbers 1 to 5 and know some shapes and colors. And, perhaps, write their name.

As one teacher said, "Read, play, and go places. And talk the whole time you're doing it." This is the pre-K "curriculum" that is important; fun stuff that pays dividends when parents relax and enjoy their children.

Police identity shield bill falters

SALEM (AP) — The Oregon Legislature appears unlikely to pass a bill that would conceal the name of the officer who fatally shot LaVoy Finicum.

The House passed the bill, but the Senate hasn't scheduled a hearing and time is running out in the short, even-year session.

Finicum was part of the group that seized an Oregon wildlife refuge last month. His death during a traffic stop angered those who supported the action.

Sen. Diane Rosenbaum tells *The Oregonian* things can change, but it's a complicated issue to tackle at session's end.

The bill would allow a judge to shield the identity of an officer who uses deadly force for three months, if the officer's life is threatened.

Opponents worry it could be used in future cases to protect police misconduct.



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