

Capabilities 15

Outcomes for Early Education

Here is a way to describe more important qualities in children than "academic readiness" or the ability to pass a knowledge test for entry into elementary school.

When children leave early childhood to enter common school they can...

Participate as a member of an interdependent community.

Care for themselves, the others and the community.

Treat others with love and compassion.

Cooperate with other children to accomplish group goals.

Celebrate group accomplishment.

Laugh and play with a tangible sense of joy.

Express many human emotions in language and art.

Be inquisitive.

Initiate new ideas and invent solutions to problems.

Stick at difficult tasks or come back to them later in order to succeed.

Run, hit, catch, throw, kick and tumble.

Sing and dance with exuberance.

Paint, draw, sculpt, and construct objects of beauty.

Maintain the community's spaces in cleanliness and order.

Greet guests with courtesy and charm.

These are all natural acquisitions for children from all cultures when they are (1) treated as capable human beings, (2) listened to and (3) trusted. Provisions for young children that offer opportunity to be with other children can create the kind of community in which all children achieve these 15 Capabilities. Imagine all children by age 6 being this way.

Then imagine being a Kindergarten teacher and having children with these 15 capabilities enter the room at the beginning of the year. There would be no "behavior problems". These children would be responsive and eager to learn. The teacher could get right to work, listening to the children's interests and finding

out what aspect of the world they wanted to explore. If that topic were spiders, for example, children would be eager to examine, write about, read about, draw, create poetry, music, scientific displays, research, count, mathematically represent spiders. Because they shared that love of learning with others, they would exceed all the academic standards by far. Experience in a culture of a learning community is true “readiness” for school, because all the children come to view themselves as capable and competent, not just a few.

The 15 Capabilities are durable. Next year the 1st grade teacher would inherit those same children, eager and happy to be at school, not like the browbeaten, destroyed children we often see in schools today.

It is up to every one of us who considers himself or herself a contributor to the early experience of our children — as an elementary or early childhood, teacher or principal or parent — to examine what we really want for our children and advocate for it with politicians, leaders, and our friends. The 15 Capabilities are what we want for all our children.

Right now the dominant discourse is about remediation for some of our children, the poor ones, the underprivileged ones, the ones that are “at risk”. When community leaders and politicians want children to be “ready” for school they are speaking about poor children. Rather than offering resources, they are offering tests and standards. The implication in the dominant discourse is that certain children are deficit and need remediation.

Actually, these children and their families need good places to be and grow with adequate resources and staff who earn a family support wage, so all our children are not destroyed by the cultures of poverty and racism. All our children can achieve the 15 Capabilities that can transform our society, reduce poverty, and make our towns and cities better places to live.

Two actions we can take right now can help.

1. Never accept talk about the problems of education as residing in the children or their families. The children are who they are, capable and strong from the time of their birth. Every here and now offers possibilities for new ways of being. That's what we do in school. That's our job as early educators of children and families.
2. Talk about the 15 Capabilities rather than academic readiness as the outcome we all desire for our children and childhood.

—Tom Drummond