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Stepping Up Through Pre-School Days

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Happiness in early childhood is one basis for easy adjustment to adult life, says Eleanor White.

The child of today is the man of tomorrow! Because childhood experiences do influence the man, nursery schools have been founded to give children between the ages of two and five every advantage of early guidance.

On the Iowa State campus we have a nursery school where all home economics students and especially child development majors have the opportunity of working with and learning to understand and care for children. Students working for their master's degrees in child development carry on research of their own. By means of surveys, tests and comparisons, they bring out important information about child training.

Eunice Phoebe Grewar, who received her master's degree in 1937, made a survey of pre-school education in Iowa. Miss Grewar found that there is need for improvement in the equipment of nursery schools themselves, as well as the playrooms and playgrounds. The main criticism of the play space is that it is far too small in most of the schools.

Even the social behavior of children has been studied. Janet Evans, who earned her master's degree in 1937, found that in a mixed group there is a tendency for pre-school girls to play together and pre-school boys to stay among themselves. Miss Evans drew her conclusions after making a comparative study of children in the Ames Emergency Nursery School and the Iowa State College Nursery School.

Rather than playing alone children prefer to carry on individual activity in the company of others such as playing a planned cooperative game like "house." Miss Evans found that children are quite sociably inclined in this respect. This kind of play includes molding clay or building sand castles, each child making his own animal or castle but talking to others of his own age who may be doing the same thing.

It is often a problem to know just what to give little Cousin Susan, age 3, for her birthday. Some practical information is scheduled in Alma Clark's thesis, "Pre-School Child's Preferences Among Play Materials." Miss Clark's conclusions were accurately drawn after observing 20 boys and girls from 3 to 5 years old.

Plastic materials, playground apparatus and transportation toys head Miss Clark's list. Toy animals come next as small boys' choices, but are not so appealing to girls. Girls, on the other hand, prefer manipulative materials and indoor toys. Blocks are least preferred. Housekeeping toys should also be last resorts. The next time you shop for a youngster's gift, get a tractor, truck, airplane, clay modeling set or sand pile.

Children are good actors with their specialty being imitation of adults. Naturally children should learn to do things the correct way, but submitting them to the tip-toe-and-stretch torture of trying to use the same table, sink or chair that mother uses isn't an easy method. If you care to go to the expense, you may invest in miniature equipment. "But why not adapt adult furnishings to children's needs?" queries Willie Fletcher, who received her master's degree in 1938.

When 3-year-old Susan comes from playing in the snow, she most likely will put her coat and hat on the floor beneath the hooks where mother's coat hangs. But, if hooks were low where Susan could reach them, she would enjoy hanging her wraps up instead of laying them on the floor.

To sit in the big chair as daddy does, Susan has to crawl up. Before she can get turned and settled, her little shoes will no doubt have done their dirty work to the chair seat, and her doll, dragged recklessly behind, will probably have put a nice scratch in the maple finish. A washable cover on this chair would save the wear and tear on it as well as Susan's feelings if she is scolded.

Miss Fletcher suggests more such simple adjustments. Reserve the bottom drawers and lowest shelves for the youngsters. Put a foot stool in the bathroom and let them wash themselves, one in the kitchen so they can help mother and one under the table for them to rest their feet upon. Durable and safe equipment, suitable to the child's needs, will stimulate and develop self-help and responsibility.

Animals are among the favorite of preschool children's playthings.