Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

School Readiness and the Characteristics of Effective Learning: The Essential Guide for Early Years Practitioners
by Tamsin Grimmer
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The important milestone of when a child first attends infant or primary school is addressed by Tamsin Grimmer in this useful book for classroom practitioners and parents. Grimmer uses the phrase "school readiness" in the context of the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL). These were first introduced to practitioners in England as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in 2008, when they formed part of the 4th principle of learning and development. The author explains how there is much debate about the concept of school readiness and states in the introduction that she is particularly keen to unpick what this term means for children.

Chapter 1 explores the difficulties of defining school readiness, and proposes that a holistic view of readiness is necessary for the wellbeing of our children. This view is supported by organisations such as UNICEF (2012), which defines school readiness as having three dimensions: ready children, ready schools, and ready families. The opinions expressed in the book are based on research carried out by the author; the research included an online poll for parents and practitioners to complete in relation to what they felt school readiness meant to them. The poll received nearly 900 votes with respondents

highlighting the importance of self-care skills, the ability to socialize, and having self-confidence in children demonstrating their readiness for school.

The second chapter of *School Readiness and the Characteristics of Effective Learning* explores how starting school can be compared to a lottery, or a game of chance in terms of school readiness. This analogy is used to compare the experience of children in a range of different countries and the number of hours a week and ages at which children have free access to pre-primary education. In considering international perspectives and school entry ages, Grimmer questions whether the United Kingdom is right in their early school entry age. OECD data outlining qualifications at age 16 show that the countries that do best in terms of their academic success have an older starting age of either six or seven. A case study demonstrates the importance of factors such as when the child is born, gender, individual needs, home background and parental support.

Chapter 3 focuses on the historical background of the CoEL with examples of practices in different contexts. The author discusses how effective learning is about engaging children, interesting them in what we are teaching, and motivating them to learn. This can involve other people, objects, ideas, events, time, as well as mental and physical engagement. Children can be involved in thinking about their learning and should be given some independence and control in order to keep their interest and develop their creativity. The chapter includes a helpful paragraph on some factors that may hinder learning. These can include family issues such as a new baby, divorce, or moving house, as well as in-setting issues such as a change of routine or the absence of a child's key person. All of these factors may affect a child's ability to learn.

Chapters 4 to 6 explore three characteristics of effective teaching and learning. These include playing and exploring; active learning and creating; and thinking critically.

Chapter 7 looks at readiness for school in terms of the children themselves. There is consideration of the children's own views and how schools and settings can support children through this phase. There is a need to think about children being developmentally ready for school and recognising that this will be at different times for different children. The chapter includes some helpful ideas about how to keep children present and how to find out their views. These include listening to children while they play or talk with their peers, giving children cameras to take photos, role-playing with children, and listening to what they say during imaginative play. The chapter presents tips given

by children to share with other children who are about to start school, providing a useful insight into what is valued by the children themselves.

Chapter 8, "Children-ready Schools," focuses on the ways in which schools can ensure that they are ready to receive the new intake of children. The importance of home visits is highlighted, with tips for a successful home visit. The chapter includes tips from children on how to become a children-ready school: "be really encouraging," "make sure lessons are fun and happy" and "be nice and kind and make them feel at home and be fun and good and helpful."

Chapter 9 looks at how early years settings support children as they move on to school. Practical ideas are suggested about supporting children as independent learners, managing feelings and behavior, and approaches to conflict resolution.

The final chapters highlight the importance of engaging with parents/carers and how these relationships can be strengthened. There are useful ideas for workshops and an example of a leaflet for parents/carers to help them to identify whether or not their child is ready for school. The book concludes with a summary focusing on children and how they learn. The key messages from the book are reiterated and highlight the importance of ensuring that the foundations for lifelong learning are being laid in the right way. The book contains many useful and practical ideas and would be extremely beneficial for early years practitioners as they explore the concept of school readiness and how pre-schools and nurseries can work with parents and carers to ensure a smooth transition.

References

UNICEF. (2012). School readiness: a conceptual framework. Retrieved from www.unicef.org/education/files/Chil2Child_ConceptualFramework_FINAL(1).pdf, on 8th May 2018.