



This leaflet is about school readiness

In many countries the idea that there is a specific kindergarten phase in the life of a child, has been abandoned. It is assumed that children follow a single learning process from the moment they go to school. The fact that an important change takes place at the changing of the milk teeth, a step we will here call 'reaching school readiness', is no longer obvious to everyone. Nevertheless we will discuss school readiness in this leaflet. We feel this is justified because the true reality of the kindergarten child has not changed, nor has the very real step indicated by school readiness. This leaflet explains how the insights which led to Waldorf, or Steiner, Education show that school readiness in fact consists of two separate processes. We will use the term 'Class 1' for the class following the kindergarten phase. We are convinced that the actual phase for schooling as such begins only after the kindergarten phase.



From kindergarten child to elementary school child

We want to describe the important transition a child goes through in his ripening and maturing, when he goes to Class 1. We will show that it is not, in fact, one process, but that there are two. After one process the child reaches *maturity of thinking*; after the other, *school readiness*. Sometimes a child reaches both at the same time, making it relatively easy for the educators. Often he or she reaches the one before the other, making it more difficult.

Apart from the relatively straightforward assessment whether a child is school ready and has reached maturity of thought, there is the question whether the child is ready in a social sense to make the step to Class 1. This also depends on factors in his or her environment, which must be considered too. When there are doubts about school readiness, a child with good social skills may still go on to Class 1. The child can fall back on these skills, asking for help, for instance.

If there is one child in a closely knit group of older kindergarten children that may not be quite school ready, there can be a strong inclination to let him go on. This can work out if the child can find support in this group in Class 1, and he matures further. But it can go wrong too; for instance, if the rest of the group drop him in Class 1. You can never tell what might happen. But a kindergarten teacher can form healthy insights into the

nature of such a tightly knit little group. What is the nature of the cohesion of the group, for instance? Is it 'through-thick-and-thin'? Is it a finding of strength against a common outsider? Do they complement each other, are they relatively independent? For some children it can be liberating to be allowed out of the close ties of such a group. This should of course not be decisive in the question of school readiness and maturity of thinking. But it does indicate that factors in the environment are important and must be weighed carefully. We will discuss the social aspects of school readiness further in the section on emotional development.

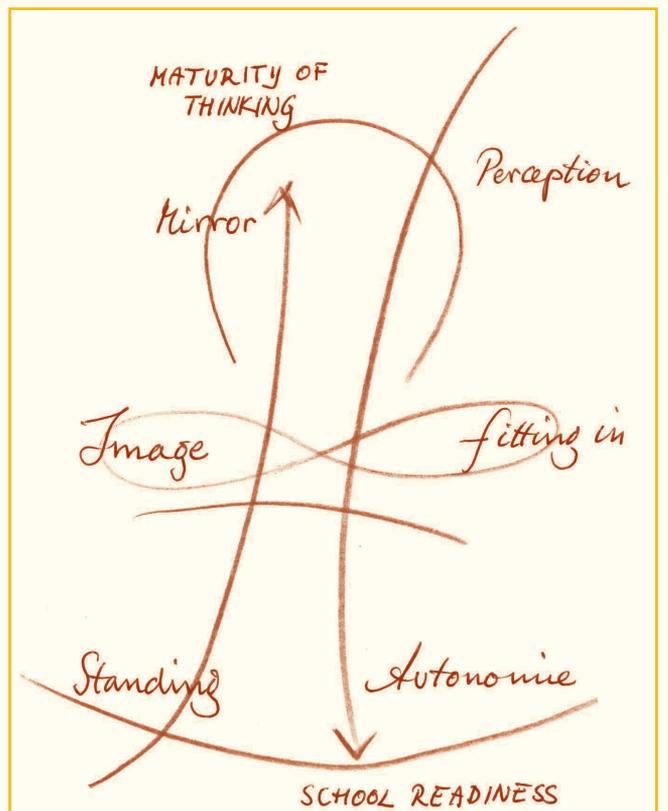
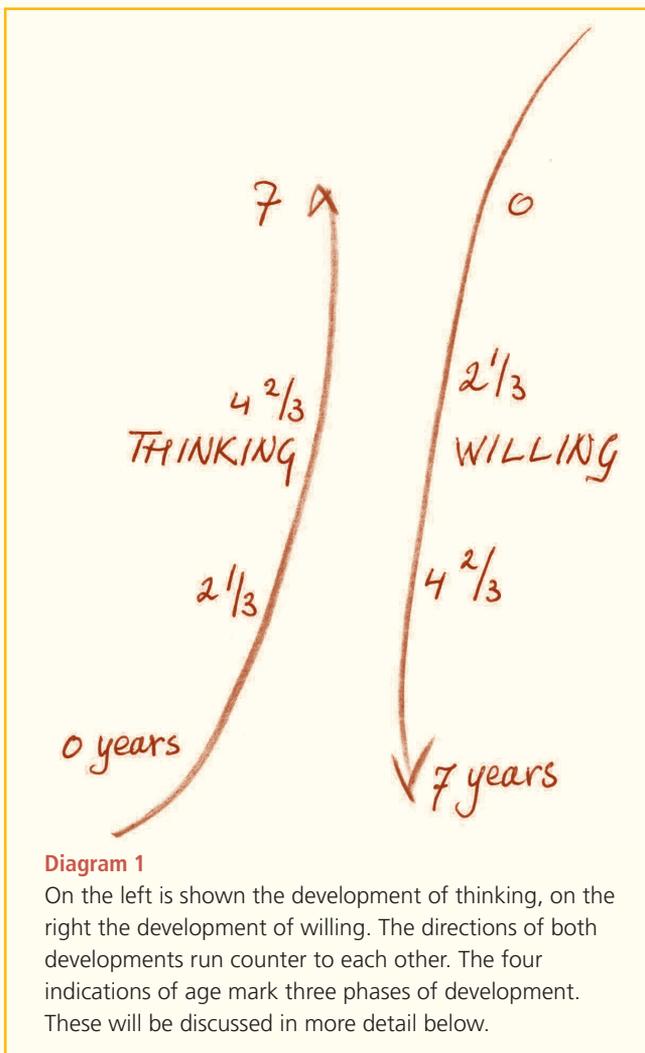
Outline

We will first outline the context for the notions of maturity of thinking and school readiness. Then we will discuss both these aspects of development further. Children do not develop in a gradual, linear way, but in bursts, in a discontinuous way. All of a sudden a child becomes obstinate, enters its 'no' phase. Suddenly he or she plays more imaginatively, and can play with other children. All of a sudden the first milk tooth begin to loosen, and the child does not know what to play any more. Both physical development and behavioural development are marked by definite phases.

The capacities of the soul, which express themselves in behaviour, belong to three realms: thinking, feeling and willing. We will look at these three realms of soul in the first phase of development.

- Being able to think is a precondition for being able to learn. We will call this **maturity of thinking**.
- Being able to will, and especially being able to restrain the will, is necessary for managing at school. We will call this **school ready**.
- Being able to sense, for example what you can say and what you can't, is necessary for fitting in at school. What can we call this, when a child has sufficiently developed this feeling? Social school readiness perhaps, or group ready. For now we will call it 'ready for learning in a classroom situation', or '**class ready**'.

The path to these three stages of maturity: maturity of thinking, school readiness and class readiness, is itself also marked by phases. And, just to complicate matters, these phases may not coincide. They are related, they influence each other, but they are not always synchronized. In the diagram below, the development of thinking is shown by the arrow pointing upwards. The development of willing, being able to act, is indicated by the arrow pointing downward. It will become clear that the direction of these arrows is no coincidence. Beside the arrows are shown the approximate ages corresponding to the three phases in both developments.



The development of thinking begins in the limbs and ends in the head, and vice-versa: the development of willing begins in the head and ends in the metabolism. These developments take place within the child at the same time. So the two processes of development will influence each other continuously. However, they can be described separately. The fulfillment of the development of thinking is 'maturity of thought' which we also call 'learning ready' in this leaflet. The fulfillment of the development of willing is the maturation of willing we call school readiness.

As the thinking becomes more and more concentrated in the head during the first seven years, and as the lower pole becomes ever more the centre of the will, the space in-between is freed up. This allows the feeling life to develop. With feeling we mean the capacity of the soul to connect to its environment and equally, to maintain a distance from it. It is important to see the development of this third realm, the feeling realm, as independent, independent from the willing and thinking. Feeling is influenced of course by the upper and the lower pole. If you are strong and healthy and full of plans, you feel better than when you lack energy and have no plans at all. If you have no imaginations and no ideas, it will affect your feeling quite differently than when you can see things clearly in your mind and you understand it all. But for your development into a free human being, a learning individual, this free space between thinking and willing is absolutely essential. A child does not truly understand something until she has embraced it with her feeling. Perhaps we should call this, 'maturity to understand something by yourself' instead of maturity for the class room.

The development of thinking

Thinking is about reflecting. Even the most basic thought process requires a mirror into which the perception, or whatever is being thought about, is pictured. To be able to look in this mirror you have to stand still, take a standpoint or 'view point'. Most of us know from experience that vigorous movement makes a quiet process of thought rather difficult. An athlete straight after his event has difficulty answering even the simple questions of a journalist. We will now look at these three aspects of standing still, the image and the reflecting, separately.

The first aspect of the development of thinking. Standing.

At the end of his or her first year a child 'lands on its feet', the child can stand by his or her self. The child has prepared herself by crawling, sitting, pulling herself up and so forth. The first time she manages to stand up by herself she is overjoyed and proud, and so are her parents. But she will not be quite stable yet. If she is distracted or looks around she falls over. A child should be able to stand firmly, retaining an inner balance, by about the age of 2½ - 3. Then the child will begin to run, to dance, to climb and tumble. Learning to stand up also means being able to take a standpoint while moving. For outer movement this means moving without bumping into things. For the inner

movement of thinking it means beginning to understand what people say to you without getting confused.

The second aspect of the development of thinking. The image.

In the course of its second year a child learns to understand 'language'. This is a great help when trying to understand something out of all the things happening around you, which is the first phase of the process of letting the image arise.

We can distinguish three phases in the development of this aspect.

A – The first images

An infant is absorbed in, and surrenders to, all impressions coming towards him. When a child has managed to stand upright, he can let these impressions work in on himself. He can begin to form an image, a picture of them. Language is a great help in this process. When mummy says 'porridge' the child may call up an inner mood image of pleasure: 'being put into your chair, mummy beside you, the lovely sweet taste in your mouth'. This 'total experience' was there before, too, but the word gives it a point of crystallization, a handle for beginning to understand it: it acquires the character of an image. Language makes the world understandable, including the people in it. The child is no longer absorbed in his environment in a wholly unconscious way: he places images between the environment and himself. These images are mostly clothed in language. From the first totally experiential images, smaller images may begin to separate. The image 'porridge', for example, may split into: 'come to mummy', 'I put you in your chair', 'warm porridge on your spoon', and 'Hmmm, nice!'

B – These kinds of images multiply

The child will have "what if ..." images: "What would it be like if ...". In the phase from 2½ to 4 or 5, it is as if an enormously creative source is freed up. Language and speech have played an important role in that process. During play too, outer and inner speech are necessary to form the story and give it direction. The creative imagination expresses itself in drawings, buildings, games and play. The inexhaustible richness of images of the child's inner world is the source of all this. That is where images of her environment live, and the images of her own moods. Everything can be turned into an image, acquire words, be pictured and expressed. The final result is not important; what is important is the flowing of the source.

C – The stream can come to a standstill

In the 3rd phase of the development of the image this stream of images changes. There are moments when the stream comes to a standstill. Briefly, a mirroring surface forms, onto which something can be projected to form a still image. Then the stream resumes and the image dissolves. The stream can gradually be stilled more and more. The images becoming visible in the mirrors begin to resemble each other, show a coherence, an overlap. Being able to stop the stream of images and sustaining it is a precondition for learning. The images are starting points for thoughts.

The third aspect of the development of thinking. The mirror

In this phase too, we can distinguish three stages.

A – Asking questions

When infancy draws to a close, the boundless creativity is dammed up naturally. When a child begins to ask questions such as: 'Why are you doing that? Why is that so?', she steps out of the stream of images, out of play. The child looks as it were in a mirror, temporarily halting the stream of events. The first impetus for this comes when the child learns to think in its third year.

B – After-thinking

The thought processes of a child of 2½ are tentative, provisional. When she says 'I' to herself, then at the same time she says 'not-I' to the rest of the world. The initial distance is formed when a child begins to be a bit obstinate in her questioning. In that phase the questions still arise after the events, they are after-thoughts.

C – Pre-thinking

In the phase beginning at about 5½ years old, children become 'pre-thinking'. The child can begin to ask questions without any outer motivation. "Is the sun just as big as the moon?" And how do you answer that as a grown up? Who is the question actually addressed to? Does it really have to be answered? In the step the child takes in this phase, the child actually says: "I decide to stop the stream, to trust that a mirror has been formed in my upper pole, and I decide to make that mirror available to the process of learning."

By standing still, by using the imagination and by asking questions, the child creates patterns in his organ of thought, his brain. He polishes the mirror until he can stand still before the pictures he is offered at school of the reality of the world. The child can now form after-thoughts and pre-thoughts, he can create 'post-images' and 'pre-images'. He can also create emotional- or mood pictures, allowing him to feel at home in a world he can now begin to understand. The child really, really wants to know what the world is all about and how it works: the child has reached a maturity of thinking.

The development of the will

To really be able to will and carry out meaningful actions, you need movement of course. But not just any movements. You must be aware of the conditions of your surroundings. You must be able to align yourself with them, and feel connected to them as a human being. To 'I want' also belongs a sense of responsibility for your actions. This 'learning to will' is a lifelong process.

This leaflet will only discuss the first three phases, referring to the first period up to the age of 7. We will discuss the aspects we mentioned separately. To recap:

- being aware of your surroundings
- aligning yourself with the reality of your situation
- and being responsible for what you do.

For the sake of brevity we will call them **perceiving**, **aligning** and **autonomy**.

The first aspect of the development of the will. Perceiving

The drifting gaze of a new born child shows she can not yet focus her eyes. Does a baby see anything? She definitely does, but in quite a different way from grown ups. It is like our gazing, when our eyes are not focused. But it is different, because a baby's eyes drift and wander. We could say that a baby's eyes are moved. The movements of the eyes are like those of their arms and legs, which in this phase are called 'general movements'. They are graceful, dance-like movements which a child loses in later years. They appear as if inspired by an invisible force. This being moved from outside is an image which fits in very well with the suggestibility of a baby. Everything that happens in her environment brings her into motion. Unless of course, she is asleep.

Seeing as an activity has two directions (the same is true for the other senses). There is an inward stream and an outward activity or streaming. A newborn baby does not yet have this outward streaming, her gaze is still unfocused. The world looks in on her, but she has no awareness of her surroundings. Only when she learns to stream out through her eyes, does she begin to see. In the meeting of these two streams, the perception arises. Initially this perception is vague and uncontrolled. Gradually the child begins to see, to taste, to feel what there is to see, taste and feel. So perceiving is an active process. It involves the will. Before this, the outer world was merely an influence from outside upon the inner world of the baby. Gradually the outer world becomes the perceived world, the world of the senses, the created, sense perceptible world. Learning to perceive well can also be a lifelong process. But the most important step in this process we take in the first 2 or 3 years of our life.

The second aspect of the development of the will.

Aligning

We can distinguish three phases in the development of this aspect.

A) The perceptions prove to be meaningful, not neutral. They definitely exert an influence. This is reflected in expressions such as: "What the eyes see, the hands want to touch." This is an especially strong urge in the first years, when admonitions have little or no effect. "Don't do that, don't put that in your mouth!" will not interrupt the 'short circuiting' of perception and action. But that interruption must come about at some stage. The space, the possibility must arise for **not** doing something, abstaining from an action. Otherwise the child will remain an instinctive creature.

B) Between about 2 to 3 years of age, a toddler gradually becomes 'remote controllable'. We can reach and influence the child with our speech. Language has become something we have in common, so a grown up can explain something to a child. The bond with other human beings which a child between 2 and 5 years of age learns to experience, comes to expression in their common language. A language which, by the way, can also be non-verbal. Toddlers who do not know each other's language can play together very well in spite of this. Play is the ideal educator in this second phase of the development of the will. Giving and taking, joy and sadness, imagination and disillusion: where better to learn this than in the self-created world of make-believe and play? In play the child learns to align himself. He learns to adjust his desires to what is possible, and he learns how to carry out his plans with others. Until about 2½ years of age, children playing together means children playing beside each other and now it becomes a real playing with each other.

C) From about 4½ - 5 years old a child learns how to make a plan, possibly with another child, for playing a certain game.

The third aspect of the development of the will.

Autonomy

This develops especially in the third phase, from about 4²/₃ - 7 years old

The ability to perceive and to align are not sufficient by themselves for school readiness. Once the source of the imagination is no longer all powerful, it is time to become bored. In a strange way there is nothing more beautiful than a 6-year old who is bored and finds all the play going on around himself silly and stupid. This moment of loneliness, being abandoned by the carrying stream of communal play, is a herald of the next step. After a while plans will begin to form; planning with a classmate what we could do tomorrow, 'Who is boss?' is an exciting question. Perhaps they will take turns at being boss. Initially the plans easily dissolve in the stream of play. Increasingly, however, the creation in the play must be in accordance with their inner imagination, which is now being fed by the perception of actual reality. Step by step the child learns to take on little tasks and to carry out

intentions. Children can be quite outraged when parents or teachers fail to notice how well and how independently they have prepared things for supper. It is a time for projects spanning more than one day. Taking down what has been built is no longer satisfying. "We want to go on with it tomorrow". In this way the child learns to make plans, to direct other children and to direct himself. It does not matter when things sometimes go wrong. It is still approachable about it. After the phase of communality a child has reached its own, occasionally obstinate world. Of course he is not yet fully responsible for his actions and deeds, as can be expected of a child in puberty. By autonomy we mean that phase of independence and responsibility which can be expected of a child when he or she goes to Class 1 at 6 or 7 years of age.

When the child has been able to practice well, he will now have a created world around himself, which he admires; he will have learned to summon up restraint, because aligning, adapting, is better for everyone, and he has understood that he earns respect when he does what he says.

The development of feeling

Emotionally a young child is still embedded in her environment. The moods and emotions of her environment resonate in the inner being of the child. You could say her inner world is not yet very internalised. The development of a healthy realm of feeling, a healthy emotional and creative life begins with a deep and total feeling of security. The **security, the safety of the nest** is the starting point. On this foundation a child can develop something more personal. **Self-confidence**, the feeling that you have a right to exist is in itself already a differentiation of the basic **feeling of security**. This self-confidence can grow and increase to such an extent that the child begins to explore the safe and familiar boundaries of her parents, of her nest. She develops a first form of **self-consciousness**. The child can become stubborn and perhaps even contrary. Meanwhile she has also awakened to the outer world. She gains perceptions of the outer world through her senses. She learns to trust these. She learns to perceive independently, irregardless of what other people say about it. This is a tremendous experience, which gives the child a tremendous feeling of **individuality**. The child discovers that there is an inner world, which you can share, but which you can also close off from your fellow human beings. She may practice safely with her teddy bear, with whom she shares all her experiences. Eventually, at about the age of 6, the child has developed a certain **self-reliance**, allowing her to go to Class 1. She can ask for help, allow herself to be comforted, deal with being reprimanded and show gratitude.

So we can also distinguish certain phases in the development of the feeling life. By their very nature these are harder to describe in a general, objective way. This is because they are dependent on the development of thinking and willing, as well as dependent on influences from the environment, and finally they are very individual for each child.

- In certain extreme cases the development of feeling will be influenced strongly by the thinking life of the child. Such children cannot react spontaneously. When this child bumps into something and an adult shows concern he may say: "It's not so bad. What happened to Alex yesterday was much worse." The grown up observes that the child distances itself from what happened, forms an opinion of it and then confuses this opinion with his own feeling.
- In other cases children reflect what their environment offers in the way of feelings. When you ask them what they feel, these children helplessly look at their mothers. In a flash they read the expression of, say, disapproval on her face, and tell you: "I don't like it." They may grow quite lazy in their feeling life: they do not need to develop a feeling life of their own, because their family supplies all they need in the way of feelings.
- In yet other cases the development of a child's feeling life is stunted because he is constantly overwhelmed by violent events. The child may, for instance, be forced to react to all the dramatic events around himself, preventing him from developing a quiet inner world. He has no idea what he feels and is constantly on 'high alert' to absorb the sudden moods in his environment.

As we saw, the life of feeling develops in the breathing gesture between surrender to, and separation from the environment. For a young child his or her environment is still all important; the child has little in the way of individuality to separate herself from her environment. The boundary of her breathing is still far outside of herself. This boundary gradually moves inward, toward the child. Around the transition to Class 1 it lies near, but not quite yet on the physical boundaries of the child. When he or she is in a safe situation the child may be able to express its feelings in a surprisingly original way. If the situation is not safe the child may remain quiet, or give cliché responses.

Breathing and speech

Our breath is the bearer of speech. Language is the bearer of the connection between human beings. So the development of speech and language can tell us a lot about the phases of the development of the feeling life. Initially language totally surrounds the child, the sounds envelop and form him. Then he begins to splutter and practice the sounds. If all is well, there will be a mutual exchange of sounds with his parents and other people in his environment. Gradually the sounds acquire more and more meaning. They begin to say something to the child, to mean something to him. He begins to express not just the sounds, but to say meaningful words, too. This is necessary for the development of thinking (he knows what he says) but also for the development of feeling. Language and speech bring the child into a meaningful exchange with his environment.

Security and safety are not the only preconditions needed for the healthy development of the feelings. Disappointment too, and loneliness, are necessary. Experiencing and processing disappointment, experiencing and enduring loneliness teach a child resiliency and endurance. How else could she learn these qualities? A certain maturity in this respect is necessary for being able to learn. The child must be able to trust herself, feel at ease in the classroom situation, and perceive and be open to the teacher in such a way that she can hear, trust and understand what the teacher tells the class.

Judging the maturity of the feeling realm, the maturity to be part of the class, to really understand, is a much less objective matter than judging the readiness for learning and the school readiness. You may unwittingly be observing and describing influences of the environment, rather than qualities of the child herself. In itself this should not be a decisive factor in the process of deciding if a child should go to Class 1 or not. It is the context, the background against which this decision should be made. The type of school, the nature and size of the Class 1, and the experience level of the teachers are just as important within this context, as the emotional and social capacities of the child. It is hard to fit all these factors into an objective 'point's-based scoring system'. When there are doubts about the school readiness of a child, this requires delicate consideration, a subtle assessment. What will an extra year in kindergarten give the child?



Physical characteristics

So far we have discussed the process of a child growing towards maturity of thinking and school readiness as steps in the development of skills and capacities. In the following paragraphs we will discuss the physical aspects of the child. We assume, after all, that a child shows us how far he or she has developed, not only by behaviour and style, but also by the physical expressions. In other words: if we look carefully we should be able to perceive in their physical forms and movements, in the way they look into the world and in their eating habits, to what extent children have become at home in their bodies. In more abstract terms: to what extent their spirits have penetrated and transformed their physicality¹.

In his book *Phases of Childhood*, Bernard Lievegoed describes the recurring phases of stretching, filling out and maturing, that can be distinguished in each 7 year phase. This describes a direction of development from below upwards: stretching from out of the limbs, the filling-out of the torso and the maturing of the head. That is the development of thinking.

Lievegoed also describes how the child presents himself in these three phases. His movements show this most clearly: from the relatively chaotic movements of the very young child, via the emotionally charged movements of toddlers to the focused agility of a child who is school ready. That is

the direction of the development of the will: from the periphery directed inwards. In the 1st phase of this development, perceptions and impressions bring the child into motion, often in an agitated kind of way. In the 2nd phase the exchange with the outer world blossoms in his play. In the 3rd phase the child is ready for a certain amount of responsibility, he can direct his limbs out of a certain inner image.

The physical aspects of the development of thinking

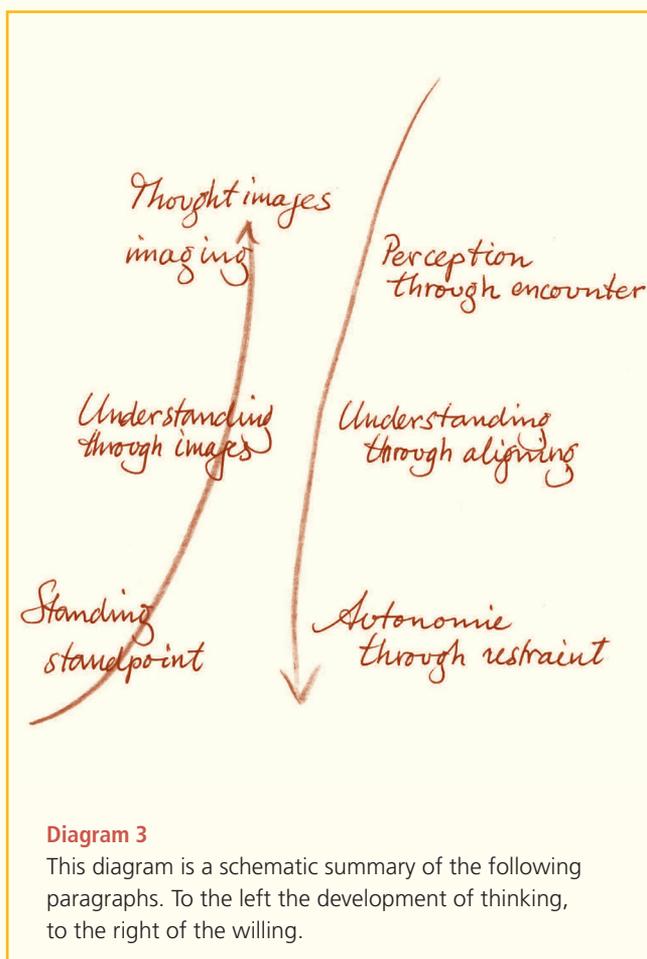
The physical 'markers' of the development of *thinking* can be found firstly in the physical form.

The physical side of the first aspect of the development of thinking

Standing – It starts with the quieting down of all the arbitrary movements. We call this standing up. This comes to expression in the way a child carries her head. A child who has just managed to stand up moves as if she were like one solid block. At about two years old, the neck becomes free, but the 'toddler's tummy' still sticks out and the spine is still relatively straight. In the kindergarten phase, all being well, the child's movements will be supple and agile. The child is most at one with herself when moving. In a certain way standing still or balancing do not belong to her. That only comes in the third phase when the spine acquires the characteristic 'double S'- shape and the child can stand up straight in a relaxed manner, with her feet next to each other. Walking around with a book on your head is a much loved game, which works when the middle guides the movement, the head is still, and the legs do their work.

The physical side of the second aspect of the development of thinking

The image – From about the age of 2 ½ -3 the rich inner, spiritual life of the child can manifest itself in images. Fortunately for us, all being well, the child will want to share these images with us. When she plays or draws she shows what kind of images live in her inner being. If we read aloud to a child we can feel how intensely she absorbs the images, how they resonate with her. In this phase the child learns to give new images to its mother tongue. Neologisms are created by the child, originally constructed words which can move us deeply and make us want to write them down for later. It is not so important if the child pronounces words correctly, or if she hasn't quite understood us. In this phase it is right that children try to make up their own words. Their imaginative, creative forces extend into the cultural instrument of language.



1) In antroposohical terms: to what extent the body of formative forces, the ether body, has been born.

The physical side of the third aspect of the development of thinking

The mirror – This all changes in the third phase, the phase of mirroring. A child of 5½ - 6 years cares about using words correctly and pronouncing them properly. When she does come up with new words, they are mostly made up, or little rhymes. This is the time for nonsense rhymes. At the same time there will be interruptions in the stream of thoughts and words. The child's gaze turns inward, pondering, brooding on something. Often she will come up with a question, sometimes just a look of wonder or a deep sigh. When you witness such a moment, you can let the child know that you are aware of it for instance by asking: "do you understand that?" or "isn't that difficult?". If the child comes back to the question a day later, you know her mind is ready for learning.

The physical form loses its toddler quality, the tummy becomes less pronounced, the waist helps keep the trousers up and the angle of the ribcage is smaller, not as wide as before.

The physical aspects of the development of the will

It is not easy to give a similarly brief description of the phases of development of willing. After all, the child manifests himself in eagerness for discovery, in the liveliness of his play and the suppleness of his movements. Some of the tests for school readiness examine these aspects: can the child throw and catch with one hand, can he hop on one leg and skip, has he developed a clear preference for either his right or left side, have the 'trunk movements'² mostly gone, etc. In the following paragraphs we will try to explain the 'inner aspect' of this development of the will. The question is: what takes place in the body during the development of the three aspects of the development of the will?

The physical side of the first aspect of the development of the will. Perception

We can distinguish three phases.

– **The 1st phase.** What happens inwardly when a child begins to perceive? Answering this question we must recognize that a child's perception differs from the way grown ups perceive. The younger the child, the less detail she perceives. Her gaze focuses briefly on a glistening leaf, and then widens again. Every impression, including sense perceptions, works deeply into her physical body, unlike a grown up's impressions, which stop at the surface. The colours and sounds of the world resound in, and colour, the inner world of the child. This is right and good, for thus her body is formed in accordance with the

environment she grows up in. But things do not remain like that. Gradually the sense perceptions migrate, as it were, out toward the periphery. The child begins to look out of her eyes, to see the outer world as a world outside herself. As long as she can still blame the table for bumping into her and hurting her, she has obviously not taken this step.

– **The 2nd phase.** The perception changes. In the middle phase, from 2½ - 4 2/3, perceptions are more and more coloured by emotions. The child begins to 'perceive' a sky as threatening, the heat as oppressive, a voice as soothing. That is no longer a purely sensory perception. In this phase it helps the child when we invite him to transform his perceptions into experiences in this way. A grown up can help by naming the emotional charge. "Isn't that exciting, such a big truck!".

– **The 3rd phase.** The next step in the process toward school readiness is the child begins to see the outer world as it 'really' is. Reality, nothing but reality. "The sunset is just an orangy-red". "I know that song already". "You know I don't like broccoli". "So you can taste it?" "No, but I can see it!" This is a 6 year old placing impressions outside of himself, placing his sense organs firmly in the periphery of his being.

The physical side of the second aspect of the development of the will.

The development of aligning begins with the second phase

Aligning – In the middle phase from 2 1/3 – 4 2/3 years the focus in the development of the will is on conquering, becoming part of and comprehending the outer world. Not just perceiving, observing it, but being part of it. For a child of 2½ – 5 years of age, this is not the abstract exterior of the world, which grown ups take for the real world. For a child of this age the world is full of meaning, full of mysterious activity. Gnomes really do exist. If she does not see them now, she just saw one slipping away, out of the corner of her eye. The child of this age lives a 'magical-realism'. This little wooden block is a boat, now a traffic light. I am the boss of the circus and you are the lion. The child is the natural centre of creation, because she is creation itself. The child's life moves from feast to feast, theatre to theatre, from drama to drama. It is good for grownups to accept their role as stagehands and property-master without delay. The child can practice her magic in the perfect security of her little world. This child is not yet ready to take up her role in the play that we call Class 1. For this to happen, the magic of the child must first develop into interest, in the 3rd phase.

2) A young child has a strong inclination to move her limbs on both sides at the same time. They are connected but opposing movements, where the left hand carries out the opposite movement the right hand carries out. For example, the one clenches, while the other stretches. This leads to a type of movements we could call 'trunk movements': they are similar to the movements of an Elephant's trunk. Left and right move at the same time, but when one side expands the other contracts. When learning to write, for instance, it is important that one hand writes and the other should be still, or act as support.

The physical side of the third aspect of the development of the will.

The development of autonomy begins in the third phase.

Autonomy – In the development of the will, magic must transform itself into interest. This happens by itself, if all goes well. A boundless interest and curiosity breaks through in the third phase of the development of the will. Interest in human beings, in what they say, in nature. It is good for a child in this phase to look after a pet, to experience a sleep-over, adjusting to the 'strange' habits of the other family. If he can handle such a situation he may also be able to handle the 'play' called 'school'. This is the step toward autonomy. This step toward the deepest point of his physicality expresses itself most visibly in his metabolism. The child can now take part in- and digest-grown up meals; he can go to the bathroom in time and no longer needs help there. He looks at the world with great curiosity, goes up to it, exhausts himself and crashes

out. But not for long: a new plan will soon bring a surge of new energy. The child can go for a seaside walk and press on, even when the going gets tough. In other words, he is capable of making a connection between an intention (from his thinking head) and his purposeful action (from out of his autonomy).

The changing of the milk teeth indicates the child is in the process of bringing forth something new. Something wholly out of himself. The teeth are built up in the jaws (in the upper pole). It is the formative forces of the upper pole which make them. It is the metabolic forces from the lower pole which push them forth, dissolving the old and letting the new come forth³. On a good walk on the beach you still have to guide and encourage a kindergarten age child with song and chatter. A child who is school ready can manage on his own, because he has decided to do it. And he can do it again tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

Some words on the development of the ego

A child who is school ready has gained a certain autonomy. That is a clear sign of the development of the ego. The ego has a different rhythm from the 7-year rhythm. The ego develops in 3 year phases: 3-year rhythms play through the development of children. We all know the yearly rhythm of course, marking a child's birthday. She grows older physically, but she also develops inwardly. The steps which are important for school readiness have a 7 year rhythm. The first of these phases is the subject of this leaflet.

Through all this there weaves a more hidden 3 year rhythm. From the point of view of the ego, the steps from birth to 3, to 6, to 9-12-15-18-21 are a clear reality. Each step is an opportunity for the child to gain new territory on her way to freedom and autonomy. At 6 this is not just a step, but a leap! A leap across the abyss of hesitation, of not daring. Only because the child has a real desire to grow up does she dare to take this leap. In most European countries, children do not go to Class 1 at 7, when they are school ready and have reached maturity of thinking, but at 6. This is understandable from the perspective of the 3-year rhythm. A child of 6 is actually quite a special person.



3) One of the most important discoveries of Rudolf Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy, was showing that the child can think and use its memory with exactly the same forces with which it has built up its physical body. In anthroposophy these are called the ether forces, which are both life forces and formative forces. The teeth are an image of these forces. Therefore the changing of the milk teeth is an important indicator of school readiness. Early dentition, however, does not automatically mean a child is ready for Class 1.

The child of 6

Whether in kindergarten or Class 1, a child of 6 goes through an important phase of transition, which we will try to describe here.

If we assume that the first phase of childhood lasts 7 years, then a child of 6 stands just before a threshold. There are actually two thresholds: the first is the consolidation of the instrument of thought: the 'mirror' that is the brain, and the second the ability to absorb everything there is to learn autonomously⁴.

The child of 6 has the task to finish polishing the mirror, forming its physical body. When he manages to complete this carefully, then for the rest of his time at school, his physical body will be at his disposal as an organ of reference for learning. Human beings learn with their whole body, not just their head. When this body is not ready, but is forced to learn nevertheless, a sort of 'emergency-maturing' takes place. Deploying the physical body too early as an instrument of learning leads to learning disorders. A child of 6 also faces the challenge of saying 'yes' to this leap towards autonomy. At the same time he really wants to be helped, to hear what he should do to gain approval. It takes courage to 'will' something yourself, and to 'will to be able to'. Many 6 year olds experience an inner hesitation before this test of their courage. They don't know what they want. We may think: "He is bored, he is really ready for Class 1". Or could this boredom actually be an expression of this question of courage, an expression of hesitation? It is no good at all for a child in this phase to encourage him: "You don't have to be afraid, you can do it". He may then do it, but only because we tell him to. It is much better if we allow the child to summon up his courage, and to jump of his own accord. We can help him in the steps leading up to this, but we must be patient and allow him space to find the necessary strength in himself. If the circumstances are inviting enough and the child is ready for it, he will dare to take the plunge.

Too soon / too late

A lot of the discussions about school readiness come down to the question: if a child goes to Class 1 too early or too late, what will the consequences be? It may happen that a child goes to Class 1 far too young, but can quietly practice the task of being a 6 year old, as described above. That is not what we mean by 'too soon'. It may also happen that a child is relatively old when she goes to Class 1, having had a year in kindergarten where she could practice the responsibilities of a 6 year old to her heart's content. That is not what we mean by 'too late'. So what do we mean?

Thought forces, too soon

Appealing to forces of thinking too soon, starting to learn with a mirror which is not ready may not have a lot of consequences in the short term. A child may be pale and quite tired after school. In the long term, however, there will be consequences for the child's health. The physicality which was not completely formed properly will be more susceptible to certain pathogenic influences. These are diseases which cause rapid aging or hardening, such as rheumatism or chronic lung disease.

Forces of the will, too soon

Appealing too soon to the autonomy of a child actually causes the child to be more dependent in the short term. She starts to work because a grown-up says she has to. She will manage for a few years, but when she reaches puberty, she may show a lack of courage, be dispirited or disinterested, which is related to the problem with courage we described. In the long run it will make a child uncertain and fearful. The child may display compensating behaviour as a youth or young adult, trying to convince her fellow human beings of her self-confidence.

Thought forces, too late

In the short term, appealing to her freed-up thought forces too late makes a child lazy in her thinking. She may begin to display the problems of highly gifted children who begin to underachieve. In the long term these unused forces will try to find a way out. Challenging behavioral problems may arise, a testing of boundaries, an inclination to take risks. Or it may lead to health issues, in the sense of 'dissolving' illnesses such as infectious diseases, allergies or problems with the immune system.

Forces of the will, too late

Making the leap too late lifts a child out of the ongoing flow of her development. In the short term she will begin to act out in the classroom, try to exert her power, misbehave. Later, as the oldest in the class, she will have to manage the authority this position gives, while perhaps still not having made the leap. In the long term this particular 'too late' does not lead to any real problems. The age difference fades and the demands of life can amply compensate for the 'test of courage'.

4) In antroposophical terms the first step is the completion of the development (maturing, ripening) of the physical body, the second is the birth of the ether body. It is not terribly important what we call these two steps, but it is important to be aware of them for understanding the first seven years.

Test for school readiness

It is possible that, having read thus far, you feel a certain doubt. A doubt which may be summed up as follows: "All very interesting, this child development, but when all is said and done, I have to decide whether my child will go to Class 1 or not. How do I weigh all this and make a good decision?" This question, or similar ones, are certainly justified. But it points to our dilemma. We want to offer clarity, but do not want to lay down a procedure for the final decision. It would be wrong to end this leaflet with a check-list, where you could mark certain qualities of maturity of thinking and school readiness: 15 points or more: on to Class 1; 14 points or less: another year in kindergarten. The aim of our leaflet is to invite you to listen inwardly to the steps in the development of your child. This is not a process that can be boiled down to an 'easy to use check-list'. But there is a certain amount of **support** for you, and there is a **task**.

The support is the test for school readiness

The teacher and the mentor or remedial teacher do have a certain test. This examines a number of skills: cognitive, social and motor skills. These skills are the so-called preconditions for learning. Things like an understanding of numbers and retention are part of the maturity of thought. In auditory and visual synthesis and analysis, the different areas must cooperate: understanding an exact image. Skills such as skipping, throwing and catching a ball, and lateralization belong to the phase of autonomy. A feeling for time is more part of the middle realm, a spatial consciousness of the lower pole. The absence of old reflex-patterns, such as the so-called trunk movements, indicate maturing of the upper pole, so it fits in the upper-left hand side of the diagram 4. In diagram 4, some concepts often used in the test for school readiness are placed in the realms where they belong on the whole. This can lend support in the assessment of a child.

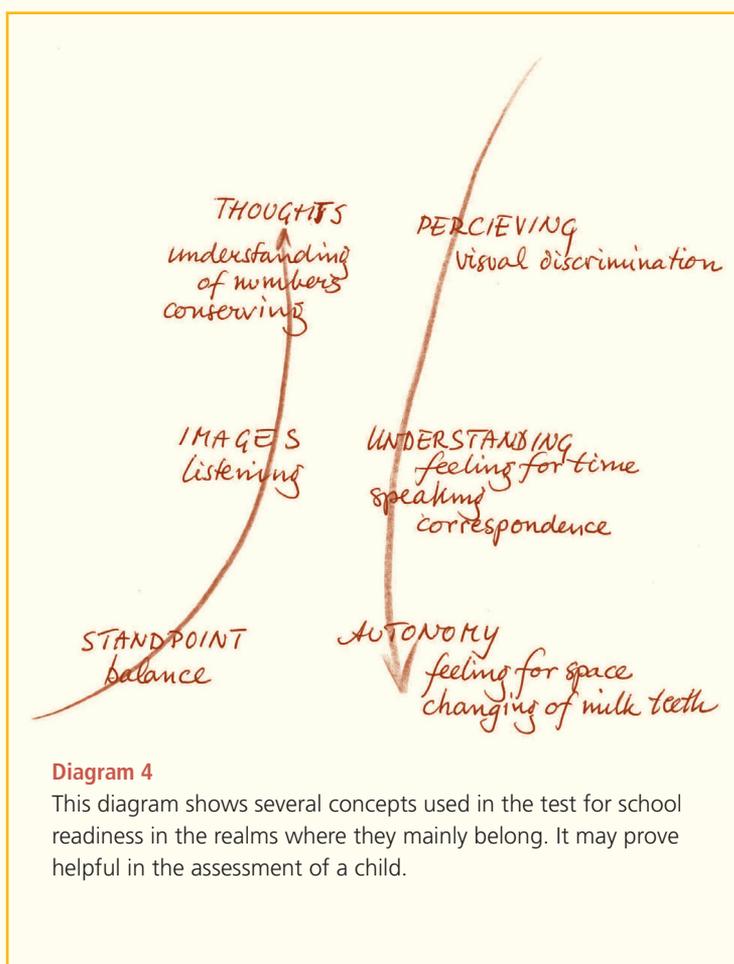


Diagram 4

This diagram shows several concepts used in the test for school readiness in the realms where they mainly belong. It may prove helpful in the assessment of a child.

Task

The decision whether a child will go to Class 1 or not, must be a carefully considered process. It must first and foremost be about the process. It is crucial for parents and teachers to have a good picture of the maturity in the development of the child, and what the right step is for his or her further development. If your child comes up with clever remarks and/or is physically quite agile, this in itself does not mean he is definitely ready for Class 1. I hope we have convinced you of that.

Reading this leaflet, or perhaps during other deliberations about school readiness, your child's stronger and weaker sides have become clearer to you. These can be seen as a workplan, a task for the coming year. So for every one-sidedness you can make a plan. This does not have to be in the form of a therapy. In class or just in daily life at home, or during after school care, therapeutic elements can be brought in. A child with a weak imagination may be offered music therapy, to awaken his inner creative sources. A child who is overly-enthusiastic or too dominant might benefit from painting therapy, learning to conform to the laws of colour and form.

Making a practical plan is not the subject of this leaflet, but will be the subject of consultation between yourselves as parents, teachers and perhaps other interested parties. The centre of all these deliberations must always be the child in his or her development; your child as inspiration for this process.

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