

The Baby Is Not “Getting Ready”

Guest post by John Holt.

Educators talk all the time about “skills”: reading skills, writing skills, communication skills, even listening skills. It may be true, at the level of words, to say that anyone doing a difficult thing well is using a variety of skills. But this does not mean that the best way to teach a difficult act is to break it into as many separate skills as possible and teach them one by one. As Whitehead said years ago, we cannot separate an act from the skills involved in the act. The baby does not learn to speak by learning the skills of speech and then using them to speak with, or to walk by learning the skills of walking and then using them to walk with. He learns to speak by speaking, to walk by walking. When he takes his first hesitant steps he is *not practicing*. He is not getting ready. He is not learning how to walk so that later he may walk somewhere. He is walking because he wants to walk, *right now*. He has thought about it, worked it out in his mind, convinced himself that he knows how to do it and can do it. And now he is going to do it.

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