

Children taught to read at seven still learn at same pace as a four year old

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(Medical Xpress) -- Research from the University of Warwick has found children who attend schools that opt out of the national curriculum and are not taught to read until they are seven years old still learn at the same pace as a four year old.

In a paper recently published in the *British [Journal of Educational Psychology](#)*, Dr Julia Carroll and Anna Cunningham from the University's Department of Psychology set out to discover if older children learnt to read more quickly.

They tested the literacy skills of children who had been formally taught in a state school from the age of four. They then compared their results with those of children taught in Steiner schools, where formal literacy teaching is only introduced when a child is seven years old.

There are currently around 25 Steiner schools in the UK offering an alternative to the national curriculum. The schools have recently applied for Free School status in the UK under the new government initiative.

At Steiner schools pupils are not formally schooled in literacy until they are seven as it is thought they will learn the skills more effectively if they have had more time to develop emotionally and socially.

However, Dr Carroll said this did not seem to be the case with reading. In her study both groups of children showed similar progress in reading over their first year of tuition.

Dr Carroll said: “In the UK we start [school](#) relatively young and often people argue that it would be better for children to start learning to read later. However, this is normally based on anecdotal evidence. Steiner schools provide a ‘natural experiment’ because they don’t start learning to read until age 7.

“Contrary to our expectations, both groups of children seemed to progress at a similar pace with their reading. In fact, the younger children were slightly better at spelling than the older ones. This shows that it’s not necessarily the case that older children pick up reading more quickly, and that the tuition we give in standard schools for 4 year olds is effective.”

The research team tested 30 Steiner-educated children (age 7–9) compared to a matched group of 31 standard-educated controls (age 4–6).

Dr Carroll added: “While there may be other benefits to delaying formal tuition in Steiner schools, it does not appear to ensure that [children](#) learn to read more quickly.”

More information: The development of early literacy in Steiner- and standard-educated children, Anna Cunningham, Julia Carroll, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*. Volume 81, Issue 3, pages 475–490, September 2011

Provided by University of Warwick

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